STARS AND THEIR SHRINKS—DAVID THOMSON

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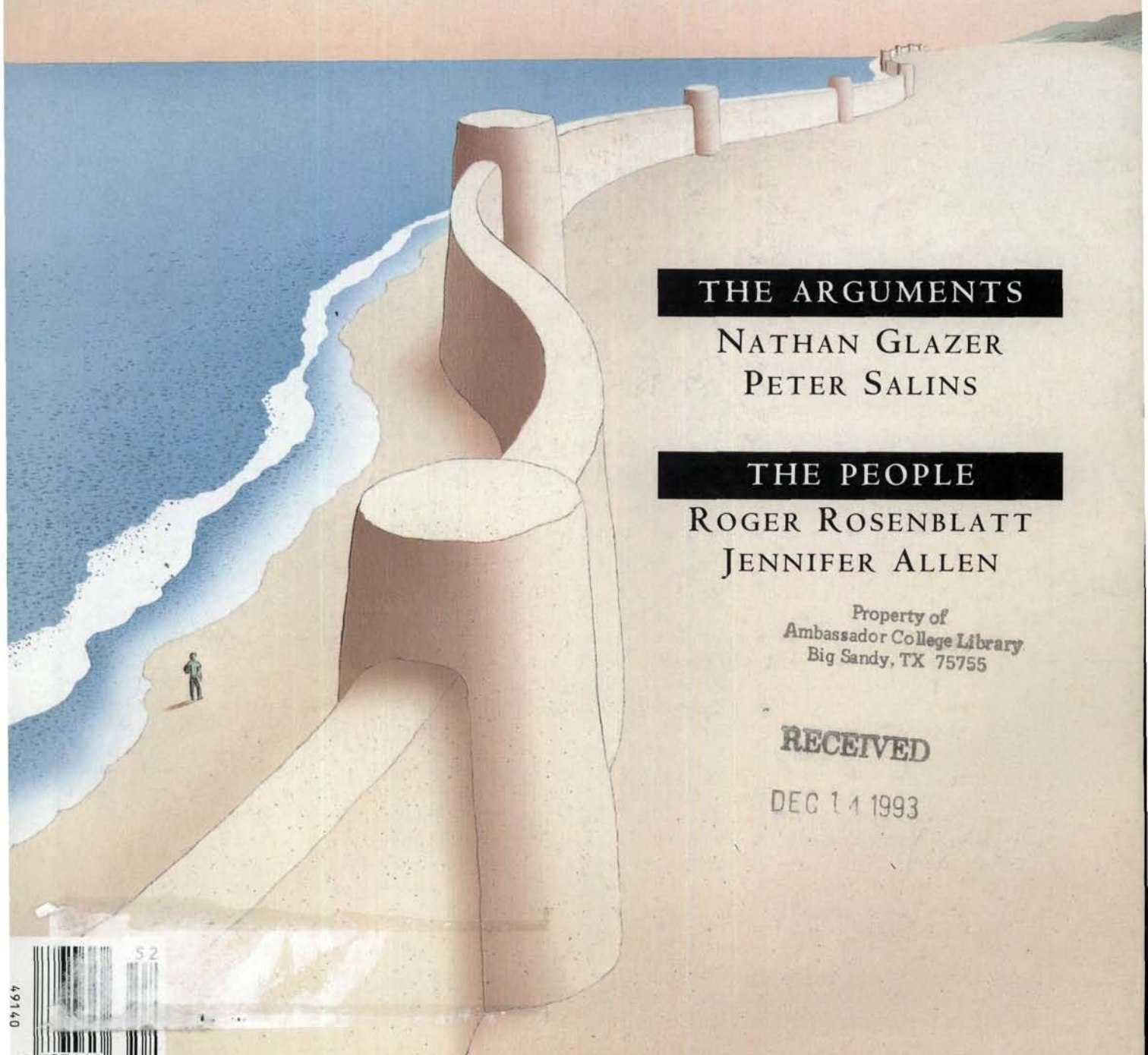

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Vouchers and Referendums

An amazing mystery about recent voucher referendums in Oregon, Colorado and California is that vouchers, which seemed to be popular in the beginning, were defeated by margins of at least two-to-one. How did this happen?

Many people are attracted by the idea of vouchers—especially when the proposal goes by an appealing name such as "parental choice" or "market schools." However, when they consider specific voucher proposals, there are usually basic elements that they find totally unacceptable. It's a little like the people who strongly favor the *idea* of a balanced budget but oppose all the ways of achieving a balanced budget—like cutting programs or raising taxes.

One basic element in a voucher plan is who gets the vouchers. You can set it up so all school-age children are eligible, including those in private schools. Or you can decide to give vouchers only to youngsters in public schools. When vouchers are restricted to public school youngsters, private school parents strongly oppose the scheme. On the other hand, if kids already going to private school get vouchers, it takes lots of additional money, and where does that come from? Do you cut spending for public education? Raise taxes? Most people do not want to hurt the public schools. But they don't want to pay more taxes either.

Another consideration is where the voucher can be used. Is it limited to schools that accept it as full tuition? This is a good thing for youngsters whose parents don't have any money to add to a voucher. Or is the voucher available for any school, no matter what its fees? This means that wealthy parents are free to use the voucher to replace part of what they now spend, so taxpayers are helping to subsidize the education of youngsters whose parents already foot big bills themselves. On the other hand, poor kids may not find any school where the tuition corresponds with the voucher, and their choice is likely to be very limited. Allowing everybody to have the voucher exacerbates the inequalities between rich and poor. However, limiting the voucher is likely to annoy a large segment of voters who want to spend a little less on their children's education or get something a little better.

A third major consideration is the basis on which students are admitted to voucher schools. Advocates have identified vouchers with parental choice. In fact, the choice has always been up to the private schools.

The problem in writing a voucher proposal that will pass a referendum is like the problem that Democrats and Republicans face in the primaries and the general election.

With vouchers, you can continue allowing private schools to choose their students, but that breaks the promise of parental choice, currently one of vouchers' big selling points. Or you can have a system that admits kids on a first-come, first-served basis, by lottery or on the basis of need. An arrangement that takes the choice out of the school's hands is the fairest, but it destroys what makes private schools attractive to many parents. They don't want the youngster with the greatest need sitting next to their child; they want a kid who fits in.

There is a built-in problem for people who try to write a voucher proposal that will pass a referendum. It resembles the problem Democrats and Republicans face in the primaries and the general election. In the primaries, the left wing and the right wing of Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, are very influential because they turn out disproportionate numbers of their people. So if you're George Bush, you have to sound a lot like Pat Buchanan to get the nomination, and the same is true for a Democratic candidate. The problem is, after you've won the primary, you have to convince the general public, which is usually moderate, that you're not some kind of nut or you will lose the election.

The history of vouchers in California illustrates this very well. Proposition 174 was designed to satisfy very conservative voters, and those people worked hard to get it on the ballot. But it did not appeal to people in the middle, so it was defeated. In contrast, John Coons, a professor at Berkeley, wrote a voucher proposal a few years ago that would have helped the youngsters who needed it most. Perhaps it would have passed in a referendum, but he couldn't get enough signatures to get it on the ballot. If a voucher proposal is to make it, it has to appeal to extremely conservative voters because they are the ones who will work to get the referendum before the public. But then you also have to make it acceptable to the general public.

How will voucher strategists proceed now that they've failed in the California referendum? Will they forget about taking it to the people and instead try to sneak it through a state legislature?

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1993 by Albert Shanker.

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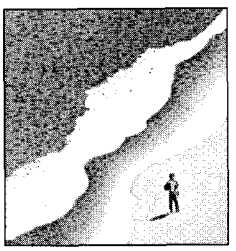

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CORRESPONDENCE

From the neck up

To the editors:

Naomi Wolf says she wants women to write in their own voices, but she denigrates the voices that preceded her own ("Are Opinions Male?" November 29). What, after all, can we make of her reference to "Outlook" Editor Jodie Allen as "an editor at *The Washington Post*," indistinguishable from anyone on the copy desk? Not only is Allen one of the most powerful editors in the country, she is a writer with a confident and highly personal voice, infused with both humor and intellect—just the sort of female voice Wolf implies does not exist.

Slighting Jodie Allen is only a sin of omission, however, and unlike, say, Meg Greenfield, she at least got a mention. Suggesting that Jeane Kirkpatrick is not a real woman because she is too much of an intellectual is an outrage. Would Wolf write of Henry Kissinger that his "voice is so Olympian, so neck-up and uninflected by the experiences of the male body, that the subtle message received by young male writers is: to enter public voice, one must abide by the no-testicles rule"?

Only when sexists, both anti-feminists and self-described feminists, stop reducing real womanhood to one, womb-informed mode of expression will women have any real chance to attain "space to speak for no one but themselves." And only then will "Crossfire" start routinely booking female guests on topics that don't involve sex organs.

VIRGINIA I. POSTREL
Editor, Reason
Los Angeles, California

To the editors:

Naomi Wolf observes correctly the imbalance between men's and women's appearances in the media. But her psychological explanation of women's invisibility and silence obscures and perpetuates the determinisms that exclude them. It takes time, money and old-boy connections to cultivate these high media places—things women, with their multiple obligations and un/underpaid labor, are short on. The women who are invited to sound off in the establishment forums are, like the men, privileged participants in mainstream culture: they do not challenge its pet assumptions. (To be fair, Quindlen sticks up for the poor.) Wolf's ahistorical theories about "the psychic disincentives for women to argue in public or to write strong opinionated journalism" ignore the economic and incestuous fabric of the inhospitable media assemblies.

SUSAN N. CAHILL
Bronx, New York

To the editors:

The answer to Naomi Wolf's "Are Opinions Male?" is easy: firing off opinions either publicly or privately is primarily a masculine trait. One proof: the writers of all letters to the editor in recent issues of THE NEW REPUBLIC, *The Atlantic* and *U.S. News & World Report* came to thirty-nine men / thirteen women, or exactly 75 percent / 25 percent.

Presumably there's little argument about certain physiological differences between men and women. Undoubtedly, lurking behind them are emotional differences. Can you, for example, imagine Cokie Roberts and Gloria Borger hacking at one another, à la George Will and Sam Donaldson? Or Gwen Ifill and Connie Chung eyeball to eyeball on "The McLaughlin Group"? Hardly.

Let's be grateful for the difference, yet allow women like Naomi Wolf to deplore the fate of womankind. But not her own; after all, she was just published.

ROBERT H. PASCHALL
Bishop, California

To the editors:

Naomi Wolf points out a disproportion of male to female published opinion editorials. I am curious to know how Wolf proposes to distinguish between those editorials not published due to wrongful discrimination and those not published due to genuine lack of marketable content. Until she can accurately distinguish between the two types of unpublished editorials, I'll decline her call to a witch-hunt. Disproportionate representation is not evidence of wrongful discrimination.

CRAIG SAUNDERS
Kirkland, Washington

To the editors:

If Naomi Wolf harbors such anxiety over attacking others in public, how can she casually perform female castration on Jeane Kirkpatrick in print? Doesn't this serve to intimidate any young woman who might want to express views from the neck up rather than the uterus down?

CLAYTON FARIS NAFF
Lubbock, Texas

Sexually challenged

To the editors:

In his article "Sodom and Demurrer" (November 29), Jeffrey Rosen comments on a perceived flaw in the arguments made by some supporters of Colorado's Amendment 2: "If you believe (as they do) that homosexuality is a psychiatric disorder, discrimination against homosexuals might well be prohibited by the Americans with Disabilities Act." Not so.

The ADA specifically forecloses its use for the protection of homosexuals. The statute provides that "for purposes of the definition of 'disability' in [the ADA], homosexuality and bisexuality are not impairments and as such are not disabilities." However, gays and bisexuals have not been cast out alone from the ADA umbrella. Also unworthy of protection are those exhibiting "transvestism, transsexualism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments or other sexual behavior disorders," as well as persons suffering from "compulsive gambling, kleptomania or pyromania."

Apparently, the cause of homosexuality, along with a host of other conditions, is irrelevant. Psychiatric disorder or not, as long as behavior is perceived as immoral by pro-family advocates, a person exhibiting such behavior may be discriminated against with the tacit approval of the United States Congress.

PATRICK DEALMEIDA
New York, New York

Real incest

To the editors:

I read Charles Krauthammer's "Defining Deviancy Up" (November 22) with some serious questions about his comments on child abuse. In the 1970s, while a psychiatric fellow at Harvard's Beth Israel Hospital, I was taught that the prevalence of incest was one case per million population and was told to regard reports of incest and sexual abuse as fantasies. However, when I was assigned twelve long-term cases, within weeks I found that three children had been molested incestuously. The parents admitted this. With Dr. Carol Nadelson, past president of the American Psychiatric Association, I found that of the 700 cases being seen at the hospital, thirty patients had spontaneously reported incest to their therapists, a fact the therapists accepted, but chose not to tell their supervisors since they would be derogated for accepting fantasy as fact.

We were faced with a quandary. Either all cases of incest in the Northeast chose Beth Israel as their hospital, or the statistics were erroneous. I was one of the handful of experts who brought the high prevalence of incest among psychiatric patients to the profession's attention. Although the problem was initially greeted with skepticism, subsequent research has questioned whether my prevalence figures were too low.

What Krauthammer comments on is that some contemporary therapists, fol-

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lowing popular books like *The Courage to Heal,* may be creating memories of events that never occurred. What so many serious professionals did in the 1970s to alert the public to the fact that incest and sexual abuse is far more prevalent than we choose to admit has become a carnival of misinformation that borders on hysteria. Because people with limited clinical skill but with an extensive political agenda are irresponsibly speaking of epidemics of abuse in every family, I fear that actually abused children now face the skepticism that greeted them twenty-five years ago. That's a tragedy.

ALVIN ROSENFELD, M.D.
Co-Author with Bruno Bettelheim,
The Art of the Obvious
New York, New York

To the editors:

After reading Charles Krauthammer's brilliant "Defining Deviancy Up," I've come to realize how much shifting deviancy definitions—even those applying to acts less severe than putative child abuse, rape and bigotry—affect one's everyday life. Last evening I ate dinner with Linda, a smoker. She raised the possibility that someday her addiction would be rendered completely socially unacceptable (deviancy defined even higher). Little did she know how soon she would be proved correct.

From the restaurant we trekked uptown to a party. In a small apartment we encountered sixty people crammed together, drinking and talking, but not a single person smoking. In fact, two of the guests noted how pleasant this situation was. Linda, her deviancy suddenly defined up, was denied her craving for two and a half hours, as she later reminded me. (Deviancy redefined creates denial, timed.)

Coincidentally, the party was billed as a "'70s theme" gathering, testing deviancy definitions to the max. For example, while I wore canvas Converse All-Stars and a wide-striped shirt made of 40 percent polyester, no one dared to dress in bell bottoms, Annie Hall vests or even clogs. When a few people attempted to replicate John Travolta's famed disco dance steps, they were quickly derided. As a *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack lamely accompanied a video broadcast of the film (which almost no one was watching), it became clear that I wasn't experiencing much of a '70s night at all, but a thoroughly '90s one.

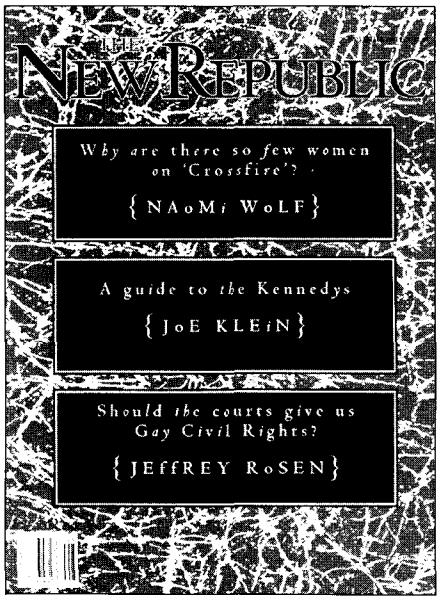
Twenty years from now, I'll remember the '90s as a decade so consumed with defining deviancy up that at a party the guests couldn't even re-enact '70s "deviancy" for one night, for fear of social ostracism.

RICHARD THAU
New York, New York

Ungendered

To the editors:

Michael Lind's review of Cynthia Enloe's *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* ("Of Arms and the Woman," November 15) was full of misrepresentations. He claims first that feminist theorists "tend to indulge in the stereotypes that they otherwise abhor: aggression is 'male,' conciliation is 'female'" and then writes, "To their credit most feminist theorists are aware of this danger, ever mindful of their dogma that all sexual identity is socially constructed, ever fearful that they will hear the cry of 'Essentialist!' raised against them." So in one sentence Lind asserts that feminists deplorably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Why are there so few women on 'Crossfire'?
{NAOMI WOLF}
A guide to the Kennedys
{JOE KLEIN}
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{JEFFREY ROSEN}

embrace a stereotyping essentialism, and in the next sentence he ridicules them for "dogmatically" rejecting said essentialism.

Lind goes on: "Again and again in feminist writings one encounters the claim that the modern nation-state is 'gendered,' as though its predecessors—feudal dynastic regimes, theocratic empires, city-states, tribal amphictyonies—were not even more rigidly patriarchal." No feminist theorist would make the latter claim. On the contrary, feminist theorists have produced a vast literature on the long and complex history of male supremacy throughout the ages. To accuse them of naïveté on this score is astonishingly disingenuous.

Most appalling are Lind's dismissive references to women's groups around the world fighting for democracy against incredible odds as nothing more than "various feminist political groupuscles," "little sisterhoods" or "a transnational sorority of feminists." In his conclusion, Lind even conflates feminism with anti-Semitism: "In a century in which physics has been denounced as 'Jewish' ... it should be embarrassing to denounce the study of international relations as 'masculinist.'" Enloe, however, is not denouncing the study of international relations, but criticizing the masculine bias that has guided much international relations theory. Given that women have been the perennial victims of male supremacist oppression, the suggestion that feminists are intellectually comparable to anti-Semites is offensive.

DAVID R. ADLER
New York, New York

Billions policed

To the editors:

The article "Oora! Oora!" by Liesl Schillinger (October 25) contained inaccuracies and mentioned McDonald's by name, so I wanted to write. Referring to our Arbat Street restaurant, the article stated, "Some of the protesters tried to smash the windows of the McDonald's, which had to be closed." I was present in this restaurant on that Saturday, October 2, from noon until 7 p.m. In spite of the intense activity in front of our restaurant, we suffered no damage or attack. Anyone who had "tried" to smash one of our large windows certainly would have succeeded.

Our Arbat restaurant closed at the request of the police. The surrounding activities did not seem to be directed against McDonald's, and I personally did not hear any anti-American or anti-West statements.

In the four years that we have been operating in Moscow, there has never been any attempt to deface or damage any of our three restaurants in any way. With its 2,800 Russian employees and its service of more than 50,000 customers every day, Moscow McDonald's has become part of the Russian community, and the fact that our restaurants have not been involved in any incidents demonstrates that they are embraced as such by the citizens of Moscow.

MARC A. WINER
General Director, Moscow-McDonald's
Moscow, Russian Federation

Indeed

To the editors:

The state of Tudjman's Croatia is clearly stated in the letter by its foreign media adviser ("Correspondence," November 22), who speaks of "Freudo-Marxian scholasticism." Need one say more?

MARIA POGLITSCH BAUER
Palos Verdes, California

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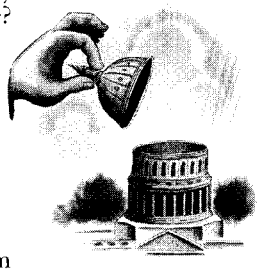
FROM WASHINGTON

When is a tax?

Washington is mired in a metaphysical argument. Is the "employer mandate" in President Clinton's health reform plan—requiring employers to pay 80 percent of health insurance costs for their employees—a "tax"? Critics say "yes," on the grounds that this money will be paid on orders from the government, to achieve a social purpose. The Clintonites say "no," on the grounds that the money benefits individuals via health care "alliances," and doesn't go to the government itself.

What turns on this distinction? Technically, nothing. The mandate works the same way whether it is labeled a "tax" or a "xylophone." Politically, everything. If it is a tax, it becomes "the largest tax increase in history," a huge increase in government's putative share of GDP, a "socializing" of one-seventh of the economy and so on. American political debate often gets stuck on categories and labels like this—as if, to take a weightier example, the abortion issue can be solved by a clear-cut answer to the question "when human life begins."

So, O.K., call it a tax if you want. But why stop there? Most states require drivers to carry auto insurance. Is that a "tax"? Most employers already carry health insurance for employees, often paying more than 80 percent. For them, is the Clinton plan a "tax cut"? All the rival health reform plans, including the most conservative, would force healthy people to pool their insurance costs with the unhealthy, thus raising their rates by government fiat. Is that a "tax"?



Or take an extreme example. Highway speed limits impose a cost in time on individuals (and time is money) for the good of society. Is that a "tax"?

What the government should do and what it should leave to private actors is one of the great questions of public policy. Metaphysical disputation about whether something is or is not a "tax" sheds no light on it. Examples abound.

Last spring two ways were being considered to prune Social Security benefits. One was to restrict cost-of-living adjustments. The other was to make a larger share of benefits subject to tax. Cutting COLAs would hit every Social Security recipient and drive many of them back into poverty. Raising the tax ceiling would not affect those too poor to pay tax, and would affect others roughly according to their ability to pay. You can argue the merits of these two alternatives all day long, but the fact that one can be identified as a "spending cut" and the other a "tax increase" is not helpful. Clinton chose the second way, and had to endure taunts that he was engaged in a "tax increase"—although it was a tax increase on money received from the government.

Another budget battle, over grazing rights on federal land in the West, is still not over. The government leases these rights to private ranchers for something like one-fifth of their true market value. (Defenders of the system absurdly deny this, but the proof is that these rights, once acquired, are often sold in a secondary market at a sharp premium.) Rights-holders are generally not small cowboys but large corporations and wealthy individuals. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt originally proposed tripling the price of grazing rights—which would still leave them a steal. In negotiations with both houses of Congress, he settled on doubling them. But even this was too much for Western Republican senators, who killed the deal with a filibuster.

Is the grazing fee a "tax"? The current *CQ Weekly* quotes the late Republican Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldridge on the general question of what is a tax: "I think it is simple. If it is a Democratic proposal, it is a tax; if it is Republican, it is a user fee." In last year's Republican election game of counting Bill Clinton's tax increases as governor, user fees were included in the list. Whether called a "tax" or a "fee," higher user charges increase the government's apparent share of GDP—a popular measure of how "socialized" the economy is. And yet what is more "socialist": charging a market price for the use of a government-owned resource, or a welfare program for ranchers through covertly subsidized grazing rights?

continued on page 42

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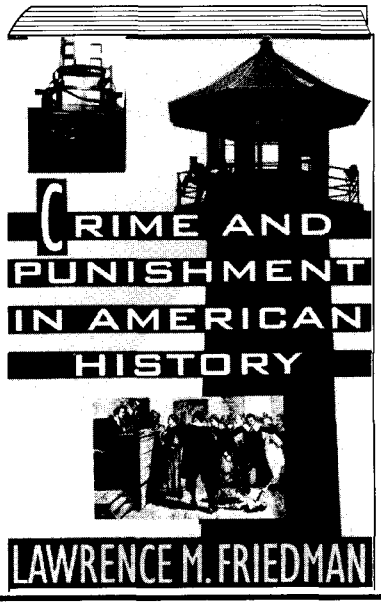
—*Yale Kamisar*, New York Times Book Review



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DECEMBER 27, 1993

TWO-WAY STREET

It has been three months since "the handshake" on the White House lawn, and the euphoria that followed it has by now all but dissipated. The Israel-PLO talks have become one impasse after another. What keeps the process going is one Israeli concession after another. Yasir Arafat says he won't come to Jericho unless and until his officials control the bridges to and from Jordan and the cross-points between Egypt and Gaza. In return, the Israelis agree to a larger, more heavily armed Palestinian police force than they ever contemplated. Then they help raise international funding for the embryo state even though the Arab League insists the boycott of Israel will stay in place. Most recently, the currency of concession is in Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners, some of them terrorists. The September 13 accord actually doesn't require Israel to release prisoners; it doesn't even mention prisoners. Meanwhile, the PLO hasn't yet produced on the only two undertakings to which it committed itself in return for Israeli recognition. One is the nullification of various provisions of its charter denying the existence of a Jewish nation. The other is a clear renunciation and condemnation of terror. It is true that President Clinton extracted one grudging fax from Arafat after one Israeli was murdered. But since then, Fatah militants (competing with Hamas) have been on a killing spree.

Yasir Arafat has contrived to see each of his disputes with Israel not as the ordinary difficulties of a complicated and laden negotiation but as an occasion to create another crisis. This may be in desperate response to pressure from his *ultras*. By it, however, he also aims to increase the pressure on Israel always to go the extra mile. But on the Israeli-Palestinian front there are not that many extra miles to go in the first place. So it won't be very long before Yitzhak Rabin will say, "We can go no further."

This dynamic is largely the result of the peace agreement itself. The Israelis signed an accord that was a stellar example of what Henry Kissinger used to call "constructive ambiguity." Since no final maps were drawn, it was predictable that the Palestinians would assume (or pretend to) that in the end they would be given every contested point. Arafat should know, for example, and probably does know, that he's not about to get essentials of sovereignty such as control of the Allenby bridge—at least not now. The bridge, after all, is a bridge into what will still be Israeli territory. But Arafat makes the petulant demand anyway. If the Rabin government were to concede on this and every other point, because of Arafat's weakness vis-à-vis his own and because of his weakness vis-à-vis Israel, it would guarantee an eternity of blackmail.

The truth is that Arafat's Fatah is not now the dominant operative force among the population in the territories. It may not even be in control of Fatah itself. One telling sign of the erosion of Arafat's sway, among many: in bellwether Bir Zeit University's student elections, an alliance between the Islamic extremist group Hamas and secular campus Communists defeated Arafat's faithful. The radical winners called their list "Jerusalem First." The "moderates" called theirs "Jerusalem and Statehood First." Off-campus, so to speak, the intransigence is even worse. Many Palestinians, apparently, still harbor the quaint notion that the peace accord doesn't—and shouldn't—ensure the safety of the Israelis. And there's little recognition that certain territorial concessions on their part may be necessary. Will the PLO accept, for instance, that the virtually unpopulated narrow strip west of the Jordan river, so critical to Israeli defense, can remain under Israeli control?

Given the random taking of Jewish lives since September 13, the Israeli body politic as a whole remains stunningly supportive of the accord. There are, of course, Jewish terrorists, tit for tat. But their deeds repel the population at large. Even Likudniks know there is no going back to the nutty dream of dominion nurtured by Yitzhak Shamir; fifteen Likud mayors have endorsed the Labor government's policy. But many dovish Israelis now expect to see what territorial claims and functional demands the Palestinians are willing to give up. Handing back to Israel the I.D. tag of an Israeli soldier who disappeared in Lebanon eleven years ago is no substitute for this, even if Warren Christopher seems to think so. Without real concessions, support for the peace plan will unravel, and it will begin to unravel among those on the left who bear the burden of the risk Israel has undertaken. There is already an emerging cohort in Labor of newly hawkish old doves, many close to the prime minister. For them the ability of the PLO also to make painful concessions is the telling test of the real possibilities of peace. "Land for peace" is properly a two-way transaction. It's time the Palestinians—and the Americans—realized it. •

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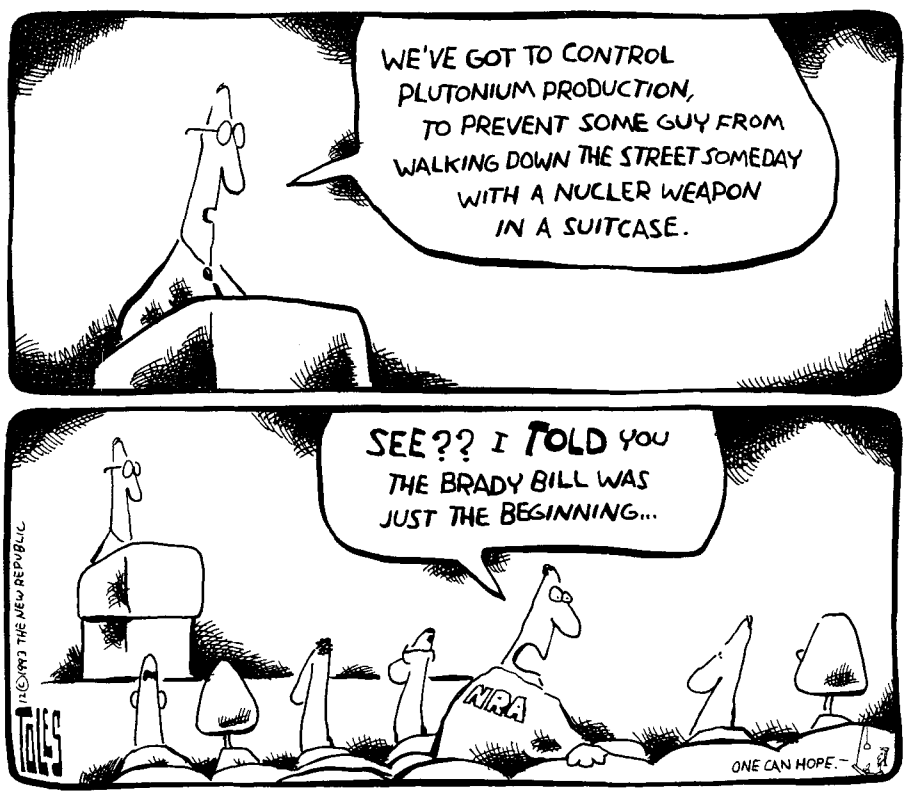
NOTEBOOK

AGENT OF CHANGE: Bill Clinton roared into town promising to "change the way business is done." Less than a year later, business rolls along as usual. Two of the top people in the administration, Roy Neel, the deputy White House chief of staff, and Howard Paster, the congressional liaison, are doing what countless Reagan and Bush officials did: collecting big salaries on the basis of their government connections. Paster, who is to become the chairman and CEO of Hill & Knowlton, the p.r. firm, and Neel, who is to head the United States Telephone Association, both say they plan to operate within the rules. That won't be hard. Paster is the beneficiary of one of the biggest loopholes in the president's new strictures, an ethical chasm we pointed out earlier this year (see "Springtime for Lobbyists" by Jacob Weisberg, February 1). Yes, he's temporarily barred from lobbying the executive branch on behalf of Hill & Knowlton's clients. But he's still free to lobby Congress, which is what he has been doing for the president—even though he now says he won't do that. Neel is making no such promises. He says he sees nothing wrong with working Congress on behalf of the phone association, which is paying him a reported $500,000 a year. And both men are to be in charge of people who *will* be lobbying executive branchers. As we have often pointed out, you can't change the culture of Washington with rules alone. If Clinton wanted to strike a blow against influence-peddling, there would have been an easy way to do it: tell Paster and Neel not to profiteer on the basis of their connections to him. And there's still an easy way to do it: criticize them for selling out.


WE'VE GOT TO CONTROL PLUTONIUM PRODUCTION, TO PREVENT SOME GUY FROM WALKING DOWN THE STREET SOMEDAY WITH A NUCLER WEAPON IN A SUITCASE.
SEE?? I TOLD YOU THE BRADY BILL WAS JUST THE BEGINNING...
TOLES
NRA
ONE CAN HOPE.

IMPROPER INFLUENCE: As President Clinton decides this week whether to pardon Jonathan Pollard, we are reminded of a bizarre footnote to the original case. Alan Dershowitz submitted an affidavit to the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1991 claiming that Aubrey Robinson, the sentencing judge, had improperly penalized Pollard for his activities on behalf of the South African government, which were not before the court. Dershowitz said that Robinson had confessed the improper influence to the late Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg, for whom Dershowitz once clerked; and he claimed the conversation had been confirmed by one of his co-clerks, who happened to have been Stephen Breyer. Pollard, for his part, switched lawyers before the case was decided, and disavowed any reliance on the affidavit; but it is a useful reminder of the lengths to which some of Pollard's defenders have gone on his behalf. For our part, we are distressed by the possibility that Caspar Weinberger may have broken the spirit of the plea-bargain by accusing Pollard of "treason"; but we are not moved by the arguments for executive clemency. As Congress prepares to pass a crime bill consigning drug mules to at least ten years in prison without the possibility of parole, Pollard's eligibility for parole after eight years does not seem excessive.

ALL THE NEWS THAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU LAUGH: When a heckler interrupted President Clinton's December 1 World AIDS Day speech at Georgetown University, it was odd that two newspapers of record, both featuring the man's photograph, couldn't track down his name. Hardened reporters, such as *The New York Times*'s Tom Friedman and Ann Devroy of *The Washington Post*, struck out and resorted to the terms "unidentified man" and "protester." Well, not exactly. "The name was widely available," concedes Devroy. "But it seemed like a phony name." Other papers—*USA TODAY* and *Newsday*—carried it. What was it? Luke Sissyfag, the legally changed name of one Luke Montgomery, an AIDS activist who could have been identified by calling D.C. information. One understands the incredulity such a name might suggest, and how it might detract from the sobriety of such a story. But it is not the job of major newspapers to rescue gay activists from their silliness. It's their job merely to report it. •

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BORDER POSTCARD

FLY NORTH

By Jennifer Allen

Thanksgiving weekend, we head down to the Baja border in a Hertz rental, stocked with bottles of water, binoculars and a road map. We're looking for El Camino Real, a.k.a. The Royal Highway, a.k.a. the place the Spanish missionaries first came through on their way to Alta California. A ten-foot steel fence serves as our compass, separating their side from our side as we head east to west. Sometimes three layers deep, sometimes nonexistent, it runs some fourteen miles from desert to ocean. The fence is a rather recent attempt to control an area where more than 500,000 illegal aliens are arrested each year. We trek the last few miles of it where the last phases of its construction end—in the sands of a beach called Imperial below a park known to all as the Border Field.

The Border Patrol calls this area "The Front Line." Realtors call this "The South Bay." Ranchers call this "The Tijuana River Valley." Environmentalists call this an "estuary." This land heading out to the Pacific is up for grabs. Developers want to turn it into a marina-condo-seaport. Ranchers want to turn it back into ranchland. Environmentalists want to turn it into a wildlife reserve. Illegals use it as a starting gate north to Los Angeles. The Border Patrol uses it as a job site.

We start at San Ysidro, the busiest and largest international crossing port in the world. Near the legal checkpoint is the place where trucking companies dock their goods, where agriculture does its check, where senior patrol officer R. Mitchell stands—one hand on his walkie-talkie, the other on his hip. Mitchell and two other patrol officers are on duty, with Caprice car doors open, leaning feet on fenders, all of them casually aware of the Mexican nationals just beyond the ten-foot fence. It appears as if these nationals are on top of the fence—they're actually on a levee—and when you consider what they've crossed to reach this vantage point, it's impressive: a twelve-foot steel fence, a ditch, a sixteen-foot steel fence and the Tijuana River. The Tijuana River? "If they're stupid enough," Mitchell says. "It's a river full of toxic waste."

Some stand, some walk, some sit on the levee, facing the final blockade—a fence lined with stadium lights and the three patrols here. Current ratio of Mexicans to patrols: 10-to-3. Some shake out plastic bags used to wrap their legs while crossing the water. All wait for a break in patrol attention. "They're studying our movements, our schedule," says Mitchell, in typical Border Patrol wear—9 mm Glock, fatigue-green uniform, Vuarnets.

"You don't know who these people are, what diseases they have, who's armed, who's not," Mitchell says, taking off his sunglasses.

A few days ago Mitchell crossed the border for the first time. Thanksgiving in Rosarito. "There's a one in a million chance that someone I put away will see me, recognize me and kill me," he says. When I ask Mitchell if he knows how to get to El Camino Real, he laughs. "The Gravel Pit? The Royal Highway? That's a good one," he says, laughing, putting back on his sunglasses.

Over at the Tourist Bureau, a combed, lipsticked, manicured, white-jeaned Latina blinks dust from her eyes when I ask her if she has any information on El Camino Real. "My boss has a history book," she tells me. "He'll be in on Monday." Historic facts at the bureau office include brochures on Sea World, deep-sea fishing and various discount clothing outlets. Historic facts just outside the office include the Amish. They are staying across the street at the International Inn R.V. Park, complete with color T.V., cable, water beds, coffee, phone, pool, kitchens. The Amish have come here to take a cancer cure at a Tijuana clinic.

"That's Tijuana, right there, those hills," says Beryl, manager on site of The Village, an apartment complex advertised as a "Spanish Villa Community Environment in the center of what's happening!" We're standing in a two-bedroom, 870 square foot, $615 per month model. We're looking out through sliding glass doors, past the gated parking lot, toward the hills of T.J. and the Tijuana River Valley. Beryl notes that the lights come on in the hills around 5 p.m. and it's real pretty. Beryl notes some fires spotted in the hills today. "We have some Spanish-speaking Mexican people living here," she adds, "But they are very nice and we haven't had any problems."

"Welcome to the Tijuana River Valley—Where Birds Fly and People Die," reads a hand-painted sign as we enter El Camino Real, a mere doorslam away from The Village. This Royal Highway is a sometimes paved, sometimes gravel road, cutting through a terrain of tumbleweeds and plastic bags, a natural human dumping ground claiming to be a park. The wind swirls dust into the Hertz and the water tastes like plastic and we don't need binoculars to see the flannel shirts leaned up against our side of the now-single fence. Nor do we need binoculars to see the green Border Patrol cars parked on mesas, green Border Patrol vans careening down hillsides, green Border Patrol four-wheelers cruising through dried up river beds. As we travel down the road, the signs continue: "Welcome to No-Man's-Land—Environmentalists, Illegal Aliens, Smugglers, Flooding, Sewage, Garbage, Coyotes." There are two species of coyotes here: animal and human. The latter smuggles illegals into the United States.

Along our way, we spot Border Patrols loading three handcuffed blue-jeaned and baseball-capped nationals into a van. "I thought they were going to get away," one pants to the other. Another patrol, this one with reflec-

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tor sunglasses, looks on. He says the area used to be much harder to control a few years ago when there was just a cable designating the border. Our chat ends when I spot two more nationals, reflected in his sunglasses, charging across the road. In an instant he is off, skidding down the chaparral.

And finally we come to the "monument" itself, a wooden plaque that reads: "This is El Camino Real." It sits in a ditch next to a discarded San Diego utilities sawhorse, a broken headlight and a burned-out, tipped-over car in the dirt yard of a cinder block home that looks as if it has been blown up by a grenade.

"Do you want to know what it is? The real honest to God truth? Pete Wilson. Pete Wilson said, 'Downgrade that valley until I own it,' " says a rancher nailing a fence up around his home, one of the few that line this otherwise deserted road. This sun-scorched man, who doesn't offer up his name, does offer up the fact that he has lived here all of his life and has, in his fifty-some years, developed a few opinions about what he says was once the most productive farmland in the nation. "Out of 5,700 acres in this valley, they moved us off of 5,200 of them. They took it away for four birds, four lousy birds. It cost fourteen people their ranches and their homes. Six people, their lives. One bird's nest. And there wasn't even an egg in the nest." The bird is one of two endangered species here: tern and rancher.

While standing here, in the middle of the road, the rancher notes that the blackened hills above us were burned by patrols to make brush-searching easier. The rancher also notes that the Econoline van that just rattled past us is used by coyotes. (Later we spot this same van at a nearby Burger King. The Border Patrols were dining inside, taking a break from a ten-hour, five-day-a-week shift, while the van zipped by the drive-up window.)

"We're the mean green, we kick out everyone," says the first female patrol we've seen, trying to move us along, away, out of the Border Field Park. The park is a monochromatic marshland leading out to the ocean. We're at the ocean's edge, on a clifflike cement-laid viewpoint that looks out across the Pacific at the Coronado Islands, and down on a beach where Navy equipment (a crane, a tractor, a truck) is situated in the sand. The pilings stretch a short pier's length into the ocean, closing off the remaining strand of what was once an imaginary line in the sand. Eventually these ten-foot-high pilings, extending some 340 feet in the water, will be driven twenty feet into the ocean floor.

"It's not about people, or illegals, so much as birds," the Border Patrol tries to explain. "This is an estuary, and when you have 300 to 400 people coming across, stomping tern eggs at night, it gets to be a problem."

From here, though, there seems to be no problem. On the Mexican side, a quiet street lines the cliffs, next to a lighthouse and Plaza del Toros. On our side, a lone worker atop the crane adjusts the stars and stripes, now waving from a flagpole set in the hard, low-tide sand.

JENNIFER ALLEN is a freelance writer.

Italy's designer fascism scare.

UNITED COLORS

By Anna Husarska

ROME

It's amazing what a little fascist scare can do to one's sangfroid: last Sunday night I was on the esplanade of Campidoglio, Rome's town hall, where Francesco Rutelli, a candidate of the left for mayor (a Green supported by the Reds), was celebrating his victory over Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), which is widely considered to be the successor to the fascist party. "*Guarda quel cane!*" said Marco, my photographer friend. He pointed to a mongrel dog with a red flag draped around its neck, the hammer and sickle bobbing up and down on its jowls. The dog was wagging its tail at its long-haired leftist master. For some reason, an alternative image involuntarily popped into my head: a skinhead doing the Nazi salute with one hand and with the other struggling to hold back a big, angry, German shepherd. As the lesser of two evils, I endeared myself to the *canis sovieticus*.

Some Romans must have had similar thoughts on the main subject of that election day: Rutelli won 53.1 percent of the vote, a 7 percent advantage over Fini, up four points from his three-point win over Fini in the first round two weeks earlier. Five days before the elections I spoke briefly with Fini. Trying to appear even more ignorant than I was, I asked him to describe his party. He launched into his familiar litany: his party is neither fascist nor neo-fascist—nor even post-fascist—because fascism is dead in Italy but post-anti-fascism is not, and in that Fini saw a problem for himself. It turned out that he was right: fascism did not make a "comeback" in Italy, but Fini's 47 percent should not be underestimated.

Around noon on election day I went with Marco to the MSI headquarters on the Via della Scrofa ("Sow Street"). The place was empty, apart from a couple who wanted a snapshot of their baby in front of a Fini poster. The press officer offered me a nice-looking watch, with Fini's signature on the face and a small flame in Italian colors—the symbol of MSI—adorning the second hand. "Very *piccolina*, the flame, mind you, because we want it *molto delicata, e non aggressiva*, since we are a *partito democratico* of the right" he said.

A glossy hardback catalog displayed in the press center advertised other paraphernalia of designer fascism: umbrellas, rulers, ashtrays, key-rings and playing cards, all adorned with the *piccolina* flame. My favorite was a pen that had the MSI flag inside: should an anti-anti-fascist

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writer run out of inspiration, he can unscrew the top and wave the little MSI pennant to call the muse back.

In hindsight this kitsch is amusing. But before the election nobody was sure of what the result would be: at the MSI's final campaign rally, organized in a huge circus tent packed with some 5,000 people, the atmosphere was tense and fearful. The air was tinged with a mixture of Chanel No. 5 and locker-room sweat. The perfume emanated from the bourgeois seated in the middle (jewelry for ladies, cashmere and fancy ties for men, gold-handled cane and white scarf for Prince Ruspoli); the sweat wafted from black-leathered skinheads, crowded in the back wearing "Fini for Mayor" bandannas.

A few days before, in Naples, I met Alessandra Mussolini of the MSI (granddaughter of Benito and niece of Sophia Loren), who was running for mayor of Naples. Her opponent was Antonio Bassolino, the candidate of the PDS, as the Italian Communists now call themselves. In the penthouse of the Mediterranean Hotel overlooking Vesuvio and the bay, some 200 of her admirers gathered. Why will you vote for her?, I asked a telephone union activist. "Because I like her." As a woman or as a politician? "Well, both, although I must admit that she has more experience as a woman than as a politician."

Intrigued by her supporter's claims of her political and intellectual prowess, I managed to have a literary conversation of sorts with Ms. Mussolini. Catching up with her after a photo-op on the balcony of the hotel, I asked her to name her favorite book. "Me? Book?" She took on the look of a rabbit caught in headlights. Yes you, book, I insisted, not without some pleasure. She stood silent. In a moment, a thought illuminated her face: "Dostoyevsky!" she blurted. And which of his books do you like best? I pressed. Another long pause. "*The Idiot*!" Why? "Because it makes me think of someone . . . " The laughter from her court left no doubt that she meant her rival, Bassolino (who won in the ballot with a total of 56 percent of the vote).

Indeed, Mussolini is totally disarming in public: in a television duel with Bassolino a few days before the election she casually admitted that she hadn't given a moment's thought to the city's budget and didn't know the price of a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk. Her "honesty" actually helped her. And strangely enough, her name seems to have helped her also: "I will vote for la Mussolini because I know her family background and I am sure she will not steal" said a 77-year-old fascist (his description, not mine) in the Quartiere Spagnolo, which remains today exactly as it was when Il Duce was around.

After almost two years of judicial proceedings known as "*Mani Pulite*" (clean hands), more than 100 members of the parliament have been investigated by the Ministry of Justice. No wonder that many people wanted to forget the past and start anew. They were ready to vote even for a failed porno star, a granddaughter of a former dictator or a total ignoramus in matters municipal. In Alessandra they had all three. But sometimes when the past insists on coming back, it can do little more than embarrass: La Mussolini held many of her Napolitan rallies in Giacomo Matteotti square, where grandpa's fascists had killed Matteotti (the secretary-general of the Socialist Party) in 1924. Alessandra's supporters self-consciously refer to it euphemistically as Piazza Della Postia Centrale: the central post office square. •

Clinton's Kissingerian Taiwan policy.

HENRY CLINTON

By James Mann

After President Clinton's recent summit meeting in Seattle with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Chinese officials emerged with smiling, contented looks on their faces. And with good reason. Though they had conducted their usual public quarrel with the United States over human rights, Jiang and his aides had gotten what they wanted on another issue of even greater importance to them: Clinton had reaffirmed the 21-year-old Nixon-Kissinger policy toward Taiwan.

Strange as it may sound, Taiwan is one issue on which the Clinton administration is more conciliatory toward Beijing, more wooden and backward-looking in its China policy, than the Bush administration was. During his final year in office Bush started to shift U.S. policy on Taiwan. Clinton has, in effect, frozen this change and, with the help of some of Henry Kissinger's old foreign policy team, is setting American policy back on the course set in 1972.

The basic American policy on Taiwan was set during President Nixon's 1972 trip, when he signed the Shanghai Communiqué. In it, the United States promised not to contest the idea that Taiwan is part of China. That principle was reaffirmed in a 1978 communiqué, when President Carter established diplomatic relations with Beijing. And in a third communiqué, signed by the Reagan administration in 1982, the United States promised, vaguely, to phase out arms sales to Taiwan by some unspecified future date. These three documents are known as the "three communiqués," and mind-numbing as they sound, they have become as much a part of the parlance of Sino-American diplomacy as, say, the Camp David Accords are to the Middle East.

The problem with the policy is that Taiwan is changing. When the first communiqué was signed, Taiwan was a poor, repressive police state run by Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek, the loser in the Chinese civil war. Now Taiwan, which has more than 20 million people, is so rich that it is America's sixth-largest trading partner and has the

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world's largest foreign currency reserves. Politically, it is moving—far more rapidly than Japan did—from authoritarian state to controlled one-party democracy to an open multiparty system. Meanwhile, in opinion polls and in official statements, Taiwan has been backing away from the Nationalists' claims, which date back to 1949, that its government is the government for all of China.

The shift in policy toward Taiwan first came to light in the 1992 presidential campaign, when Bush announced that the United States would sell F-16 fighters to the Nationalist government. Bush's action—which reversed more than a decade of American refusal to sell Taiwan the warplanes—was misperceived as a hasty political move to gain votes in Texas. (The F-16s were built by General Dynamics in Fort Worth.)

That interpretation is wrong. Politics may have dictated the timing of Bush's announcement, but the sale was, in fact, the result of a year of ferment in the foreign policy apparatus over whether to loosen Taiwan policy.

The origins of the change date to the summer of 1991, when James Lilley—the one-time CIA official who had just stepped down as Bush's ambassador to Beijing—said in a speech that China's claims over Taiwan were "anachronistic." Lilley asserted that the United States had been "locked for too long into the three communiqués." Though Lilley was out of public office at the time, his comments amounted to a stunning high-level challenge to the basic tenets that had governed America's China-Taiwan policy since the Nixon era.

Beginning in the late fall of 1991, a small group of Bush administration officials began meeting to reevaluate Asia policy, including plans for China and Taiwan. Among them were Douglas Paal, director of Asia policy for the National Security Council, and eventually Lilley, who had rejoined the administration as assistant secretary of defense. They were concerned about China's growing military expenditures, its purchases of advanced Sukhoi-27 warplanes from Russia and its expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The first result of this policy review was the F-16 sale. And the second result, at the end of 1992, was an official trip to Taipei by U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills, the first Cabinet-level visit to Taiwan since the break-off of diplomatic ties thirteen years earlier. These two moves made the Chinese nervous.

Enter Bill Clinton. During his presidential campaign, Clinton had savaged Bush for "coddling the dictators of Beijing" with regard to human rights. It is now fashionable to say that Clinton has abandoned these promises, and that his China policy is the same as Bush's. But those criticisms focus on rhetoric rather than on policy, and they aren't true, at least not so far: Clinton's human rights policy has been demonstrably tougher than that of the previous administration and is in line with his campaign statements.

Under Bush, the Democratic Congress repeatedly passed legislation that would have made renewal of China's most favored nation trade benefits contingent on human rights improvements. Bush, who favored unconditional MFN benefits, always vetoed the legislation. Two of the architects of Bush's policy of reconciliation with Beijing had been charter members of the old Kissinger crowd: national security adviser Brent Scowcroft and Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

Clinton's position on China during the campaign fell far short of the Bush "read my lips, no new taxes" level of specificity. While denouncing dictators, Clinton also added the soothing homily that "we don't want to isolate China." More important, like the Democratic Congress under Bush, he never came out for complete MFN revocation; he only promised to make benefits conditional on progress in human rights.

That is what Clinton has done in the White House. If in recent months he has upgraded the level of contacts with Beijing, it is largely because he changed the Bush policy of unconditional MFN renewals—and now realizes that China may refuse to satisfy his conditions for human rights progress, thus jeopardizing trade between the two countries. On human rights, the issue is not whether Clinton has been tougher than Bush, but rather, first, what he will do next year if his new policy produces meager results, and second, whether while pressing on human rights, he is quietly yielding to China in other areas. That is where Taiwan comes in.

It is testimony to Henry Kissinger's remarkable quarter-century of influence over American foreign policy and personnel that when Clinton put together his administration, two of his principal advisers on China policy, national security adviser Anthony Lake and Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord, were Kissinger alums, just like Scowcroft and Eagleburger.

Neither of these two Clinton appointees would be happy to be branded a Kissingerite. Lake resigned from the Nixon administration after the 1971 invasion of Cambodia. Lord broke openly with Kissinger after the 1989 Beijing massacre, when Kissinger sympathized with Deng Xiaoping's decision to stop the Tiananmen Square demonstrations. On questions of human rights in China, both Lord and Lake stand 180 degrees opposite that of their mentor.

Yet the behavior of these two Clinton advisers seems much like that of the son who rebels against his father, while embracing some of his underlying values. On Taiwan, the new administration quickly reverted to the old touchstones. At his confirmation hearings in March, Lord, in the first public statement of Asia policy, paid homage to the three communiqués, thus reassuring Beijing that the administration wasn't planning to be too adventurous. And there has been no sign of change since then. The administration's general thinking on Taiwan was best summed up by one senior official, who argued privately: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

The result is that while the administration is giving new emphasis to Asia, its approach to Taiwan (as well as one other anomaly, Vietnam) is dragged down by the continuing legacy of the Nixon era. Taiwan, arguably the one Asian government whose political development has proceeded most closely along the lines the United States

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would want, is still treated as an untouchable. Indeed, while Clinton is willing to meet in the White House with the Dalai Lama or with Salman Rushdie, Taiwan's top officials are barred from even visiting Washington. In the past year, Taiwan has resorted to demeaning, manipulative gambits such as arranging honorary degrees for its officials at American colleges in order to circumvent its continuing status as international pariah.

In the wake of the Seattle meeting between Clinton and Jiang, which produced no immediate agreements of any kind on human rights, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen was ebullient. "President Clinton emphasized that he is committed to the one-China policy and to the three communiqués," he boasted to reporters. China had gotten what it wanted on Taiwan. And it is seeking further concessions: when Clinton asked the Chinese for talks about their sale of M-11 missiles to Pakistan, the Chinese replied that they would do so only if the United States agreed to discuss the F-16 sale.

So far, Clinton seems not to have grasped the significance of the Taiwan issue. If he wants to register his unhappiness with China's repressive policies—such as its jailing of Hong Kong journalists—he could respond by sending a senior Cabinet member to Taiwan or letting a senior Taiwan official come to Washington. He could adjust American policy to take account of the fact that Taiwan is no longer what it was in 1972. Most of all, he could stop paying homage to stale formulas from which even the previous administration was starting to retreat.

JAMES MANN covers national security issues for the *Los Angeles Times.*

A new way to let them in.

TAKE A TICKET

By Peter D. Salins

The trouble with the immigration debate of the past year or so is that much of it is simply unreal. Intellectuals have been arguing over abstractions, while the insecurities of ordinary Americans have been inflamed by prejudice and misinformation. Those both for and against immigration behave as if it were politically conceivable that the United States might drastically cut immigration again, as we did in the 1920s, and as if our borders could be effectively sealed if we chose to do so. In spite of resurgent nativism, any proposal to sharply curtail legal immigration would meet massive resistance across the political spectrum—from liberals who see open immigration as a basic ingredient of the universalist American idea to conservatives attached to free markets and open international borders. If it came to a vote in Congress, a bipartisan pro-immigration alliance would emerge even stronger than the one behind NAFTA, using the same arguments (the long-term economic benefits of immigration outweighing its short-term stresses, the politics of fear versus the politics of hope, etc.). Buttressing the argument would be our proven inability to stem illegal immigration, because any reduction in the quota of legal immigrants almost certainly would be offset by an increase in illegal immigration—an unsettling prospect for most Americans, but especially for the nativists.

So rather than contesting the volume of immigrants, we might re-examine how we actually allocate immigration in a world where the number of potential immigrants vastly exceeds the most generous quota we could tolerate, and how we treat immigrants once they get here. But first, a few facts to reassure ourselves about the benign nature of immigration. To begin with, America is not being inundated with immigrants. While the volume has risen steadily since the national origins quota system was scrapped in 1965, the rate of immigration relative to the nation's base population is far below historic levels. Due in large part to the amnesty of 1.5 million illegal aliens as part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (Simpson-Rodino), the average rate of legal immigration in the 1981 to 1990 period reached a post-Depression high of 3.1 percent per 1,000 U.S. residents. This rate is below that of every decade from 1830 to 1930, and is about the same as the long-term immigration rate since American independence. Moreover, the percentage of foreign-born in the U.S. population has fallen from 8.8 percent in 1940 to 6.8 percent today.

As important as the volume of immigration is its geography. Most immigrants remain near America's gateways at the perimeter of the country. The greatest number, nearly 40 percent of the total since 1987, live in Southern California, with other large cohorts in New York City, south Florida, Texas and Chicago. Most of the rest can be found in a handful of urban areas on the east and west coasts. Most Americans do not live near immigrants. This suggests either that the new nativism is confined to the peripheral immigrant bastions or that some nativists don't need to meet immigrants to dislike them.

Another critical fact: immigrants have been moving to—and staying in—America's cities, filling a vacuum left by native urban households that have been fleeing to the suburbs for more than forty years. Until a new surge of immigration into New York in the 1980s, the city had been losing population—nearly a million from 1970 to 1980. Since 1980 New York is the only city east of the Mississippi to gain population. Wherever they have settled, immigrants have reclaimed inner-city neighborhoods that had fallen into a state of advanced decay. True, poor blacks and other native minorities moved to these zones of white abandonment first, but at unviably low densities, and with households whose poverty and pathology only exacerbated their devastation.

In spite of their growing presence in American cities, immigrants have not displaced the native minority poor

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in the labor force. Hypothetically, the low-wage, low-skill work done by the least skilled immigrants in these ethnic enclaves might otherwise have employed native blacks or Puerto Ricans. But most of these jobs didn't exist before the immigrants came, and most native workers would have spurned them even if they had. As a matter of fact, recent studies show that the unemployment rates of blacks living in or near immigrant enclaves actually fell, following the immigrant influx. Immigrant labor also does not appreciably lower native workers' wages very much. A study by LaLonde and Topel estimates that when immigrant participation in a local labor market doubles, the wages of young blacks in general may fall by 4 percent or less, and those of other minorities are unaffected.

How about the indirect economic impact of immigration, on state and local government budgets, that California's Governor Pete Wilson is so concerned about? All these immigrant children require an education and, at $5,000 per child—thousands more than their parents' local tax contribution—they have filled up the inner-city schools. Here, too, the burden looks greater in the abstract than in reality. Frankly, these inner-city school systems—in New York, Chicago, Miami and L.A.—were dying before the immigrants came. With declining populations, the districts still absorbed a large amount of public funds, without much to show for them. Just as with the cities' dying neighborhoods, the immigrants rescued the schools, not only from bankruptcy, but also irrelevance.

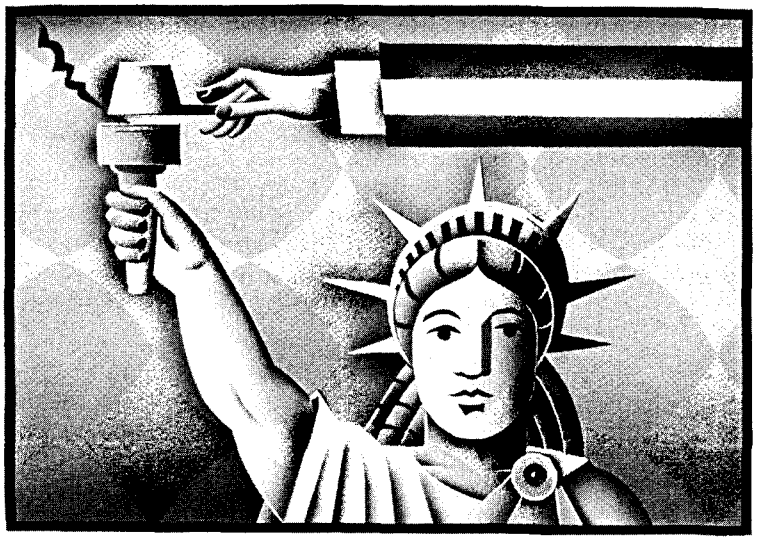

ILLUSTRATION BY MILAN TRENC FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

What about that most frightening of the nightmare scenarios promoted by the immigration alarmists: that America will become—God help us—a *nonwhite nation.* Of course, the proper response to this hobgoblin should be: So what? But even those who secretly harbor misgivings about a radical change in the country's racial profile can relax, because the vanishing white majority scare is vastly overblown. The two largest immigrant groups are Hispanic and Asian. Now, Hispanic is not a racial category at all; it's a linguistic one. Even the newer label for this group—Latino—is not racial, it's geographic. Whatever the label, the Latino cohort is very racially mixed, from as white as any Northern European to darker than most native blacks. The vast majority, however, including most Mexicans, have a mixed racial background, and—not that it matters—don't look very different from Americans of Southern European descent, and classify themselves as white in surveys. The same is increasingly the case for Asians.

The truth is, the immigration scare does not reflect a genuine problem, it reflects a genuine panic. The panic is brought on by economic dislocation, which is all too easily laid at the door of immigrants. That is not to say there should not be an immigration debate. On the contrary, it is long overdue. The debate should be not about how many, but rather who, and how, they should be let into the country. Categorical preferences built into the current immigration policy exacerbate both the geographic and ethnic concentration of immigrants, adding to the burden of their assimilation, and pouring fuel on the nativist fires. It's time it was overhauled.

The liberalization of immigration legislated in 1965 was supposed to end the Northern European bias of the nativist-inspired national origins quota system of 1925. The reforms certainly succeeded in that respect, redirecting immigration from Northern Europe to Latin America and Asia. But, at the same time, the preference categories of the current law have perpetuated the root bias of a national origins system, only with a new set of favored nationalities. The largest preference categories under present immigration policy promote "family reunification." This means that once a nationality gains a significant demographic foothold in the United States, it has a vested claim on the immigration quota roughly in proportion to its share of the foreign-born population: exactly the concept that animated the old national origins system. Indeed, the family preferences were written into the 1965 law primarily to reassure the nativists that the national origins idea was not being scrapped entirely. Since the new law's inception, around 70 percent of all legal immigrants have been admitted under one or another family reunification preference category. And with the amnesty provision of the Simpson-Rodino law, the preference has been effectively extended to millions of illegal immigrants as well.

The primary beneficiaries of immigration's family reunification tilt have been Mexicans. Since 1981 more than 30 percent of all legal immigrants to the United States have come from Mexico. The fact that Mexicans account for only 18 percent of all legal immigration since 1965 proves that the national origins bias of family reunification increases over time. Family preferences have also insured that what remains of the pool of legal entrants is dominated by other Latin Americans and Asians from just a few countries: the Philippines, China, Korea and India. The Simpson-Rodino amnesty of

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2.5 million illegals, the vast majority of them Mexicans, has further intensified the nationality biases of family reunification, and has been a major factor in provoking a nativist backlash.

The question we failed to ask in these matters is: Why family? The truth is, the family preference violates the underlying rationale of immigration. The United States has historically welcomed immigrants, to a much greater extent than any other modern society, for a number of reasons. Cynics say it did so because some of its most powerful industries needed cheap labor. Sure, but this need could have been filled by merely admitting "guest workers" as the Europeans do. There has been a deeply idealistic aspect to most Americans' acceptance of immigrants. Americans believe in starting over and giving people with ambition and determination, at home and abroad, the opportunity to do so. Americans also realize, intuitively, that immigrants have the ability to recharge the national batteries, supplying new skills, new perspectives, new cultural attributes, that can make the country a more successful and cosmopolitan nation. It was because the national origins immigration quotas violated these basic precepts that the old system was scrapped in 1965. Well, the current system is coming to violate them even more, with nationality biases greater than those of the old system, and mostly because of the family bias.

The other favored set of foreigners are those admitted under refugee and asylum preferences, who account for 15 percent of all immigrants during the last decade. Refugee and asylum preferences have a solid justification, given all the repressive regimes in the world, but they have been seriously compromised by our foreign policy biases. When both Nicaragua and El Salvador were in turmoil during the 1980s, Nicaraguans fleeing a Communist dictatorship were accepted as refugees, while Salvadorans fleeing right-wing death squads were not. Likewise, Cubans were admitted as refugees from the time Castro took power, while no dictator is bloody enough for Haitians to be welcomed. And since most Third World autocracies are also poor, every refugee/asylum case involves a judgment call as to whether its motivation is economic or political.

So there are good reasons to change the preference system. How to do it? There are some who would replace the family-based preferences with ones favoring high levels of skill or education, like Canada does. But such a "designer immigration" bias is not only unfair—vesting the privilege of American immigration in precisely those who have been the most privileged in their native lands—it is not even especially helpful to the economy. Our real labor needs—notwithstanding popular perceptions and high unemployment rates among unskilled natives—are at the bottom of the labor market, mainly in services. And the labor market's demand for skilled professionals is amply met by the large number of foreign students who stay and work here after their graduation and by immigrants admitted on other than skill preferences.

Why not, instead of unfair family rules and unnecessary skills rules, adopt a policy that effectively makes admission to the United States a matter of "first-come, first-served." Of the roughly 700,000 legal (non-amnesty) immigration slots we make available in a typical year, perhaps 150,000 could be reserved for the spouses or minor children of U.S. residents—a much reduced preference for the reunification of nuclear families, and perhaps 75,000 could be set aside for refugees. The other 475,000 could be available for applicants from any nation on earth. How might such a system work? Subject to an annual global cap, applications for immigration would be reviewed and approved in the order they were received at designated centers in each country. To avoid having the immigrant pool swamped by applicants from the most populous countries (with 40 percent of the world's population, China and India might dominate such a system) perhaps no country's annual quota should exceed some percentage of the total. However it were fleshed out, the objective of such a first-come, first-served concept would be to offer immigration to the most highly motivated candidates, from a maximally diverse set of backgrounds, selected by the fairest and most objective of procedures.

The United States has not made a mistake by admitting millions of immigrants since the law was changed in 1965. Indeed, America's liberal immigration policy is one of our proudest public accomplishments. But America's liberal immigration policy is more likely to find continued acceptance among most Americans and keep the nativists at bay if the immigration preference system is changed to assure a fairer and more nationally diverse pool of immigrants. So let's not turn our backs on one of the most successful American ideas. Let's get it right.

PETER D. SALINS is a senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

Is restrictionism unthinkable?

THE CLOSING DOOR

By Nathan Glazer

Clearly we are at the beginning of a major debate on immigration. The issue has been raised most immediately in recent months by the immigrants, legal and illegal, now charged with the devastating bombing of the World Trade Center and with planning the bombing of other major New York buildings and New York transportation links; and by the interception of vessels carrying illegal Chinese immigrants approaching New York and California. But the issue is larger than how to control illegal immigration, difficult as this is. Despite the presence of

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a mass of laws, regulations and court rulings controlling immigration, we are shaky as a polity on the largest questions that have to be answered in determining an immigration policy: What numbers should we admit, of what nations and races, on what basis should we make these decisions, how should we enforce them?

To answer these questions we will have to define our expectations about immigration, its effects on American society, economy, polity. It is a serious question whether the American political system is capable of giving any coherent response to these questions. Indeed, it could be argued that we have not been capable of a coherent response since the key decisions, now execrated in all quarters, of the 1920s.

I should say execrated in almost all quarters, for there are now bold voices, such as Thomas Fleming in the obscure journal *Chronicles* and Peter Brimelow in the not at all obscure *National Review*, that raise the question: What was wrong with the decisions of the 1920s, and do they not have something to teach us? Those decisions banned almost all immigration from Asia, and limited immigration from the eligible countries of the Eastern Hemisphere (almost all European) to 150,000 a year. Most of that was reserved for the British Isles and Germany: Southern and Eastern European countries—the source of most immigration at the time—were limited to tiny quotas. We see this act now as racist in its preference for whites and discriminatory in its preference for Protestant countries and its sharp restrictions on the countries from which Jewish immigrants then came. It was also considered anti-Catholic, although Catholics could come in under the ample quotas for Ireland and Germany.

But we can phrase the intentions of the 1924 act in quite another way: it said that what America was in 1920; in terms of ethnic and racial makeup, was in some way normative, and to be preferred to what it would become in the absence of immigration restriction; and it said that the United States was no longer to be a country of mass immigration. The 1924 law called for a remarkable scholarly exercise to determine the national origins of the white population: each country would have a share in the quota of 150,000 proportional to its contribution to the makeup of the white population. That this system prevailed, with modifications, for forty years, suggests that the opposition to it, while impassioned, did not have much political power.

Despite the refugee crisis of the 1930s, the displaced persons crisis of the post-World War II period, it survived: the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 made little change in the overall pattern. The consensus of 1924 was finally swept away in 1965. The coalition that forced the abandonment of the arrangement of 1924 consisted of Jews, Catholics and liberals, who had for years fought against the preferences for Northwestern Europe and the restrictions on Asia. The new immigration act abandoned all efforts to make distinctions among nations on grounds of race, size or historical connection. All would in principle be limited to a maximum of 20,000, under an overall cap of 290,000.

The dominating principles of the 1965 act were family connections and no discrimination on grounds of national origin. Italians, Poles, Greeks or Jews would not be limited by highly restrictive quotas in their ability to enter the United States to join relatives; Asians would no longer be limited to minuscule quotas. But the government expected no great change in the volume or ethnic and racial character of immigration.

As it happens, there were not many Jews left in Europe who wanted to come or who could leave, even though Jewish organizations and members of Congress led the fight for a freer immigration policy. European prosperity soon reduced the number of Europeans who wanted to come; Communist rule restricted the number of Eastern Europeans who could come. Quite soon the composition of immigration changed from overwhelmingly European to overwhelmingly Asian, Latin American and Caribbean. This was unintended and unexpected, but it was accepted. It played no role in the next great effort to fix immigration in the late 1970s. No one raised the question of why immigration to a country that had been settled by Europeans now included so few Europeans. The new immigration issue of the late 1970s was illegal immigration, primarily from Mexico.

A major immigration commission was set up in 1978. Its recommendations were incorporated into the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Reform Act of 1981, whose descendant finally became law as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. That act addressed the illegal immigration issue with a deal: those already here could apply, with restrictions, to legalize their status, but further numbers of illegal immigrants would be stanched by imposing penalties on employers who hired illegal immigrants.

In a few years further modifications were necessary. The new problem was that an immigration law oriented toward family preference meant preference for recent immigrants' relatives, those still linked by family connection to their emigrating relatives. This meant we would have few Europeans, who had immigrated a long time ago, and many Asians and Latin Americans. Congress tried to deal with this through lotteries. But the lotteries could not be for Europeans alone; they had to include a host of "underrepresented" nations.

Yet another issue that became evident under the settlement of 1965, and the changes of 1986, was that the numbers of immigrants who had family preference limited those who might enter with valuable skills in short supply in the United States, such as highly skilled machinists. And so the last major modification in the 1990 immigration law increased the number of those who could enter on the basis of needed skills. But it was not possible politically to reduce the number who came on the basis of family relationship, so the total number of allowable immigrants was raised. This is the kind of compromise that might surprise most Ameri-

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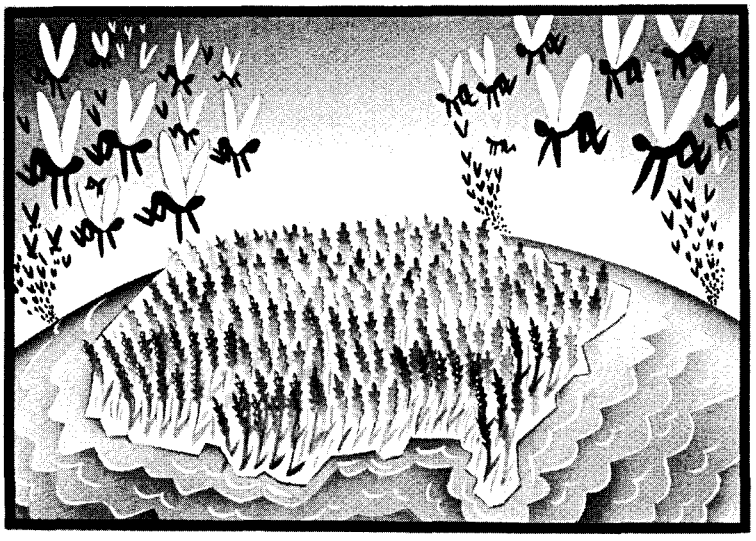
cans, if they knew about it. The total number of immigrants who can enter legally is now 700,000 (to which must be added 130,000 or so refugees, who come in under a separate allotment, and those seeking asylum).

So we move from crisis to crisis, or at least from problem to problem. The next crisis, already upon us, is the specific impact of large numbers of immigrants on the major cities that attract them: Los Angeles, New York and Miami, pre-eminently. Here the issue is local costs, particularly for schools, hospitals, welfare services—costs that are inevitable when population rises. New York City reports that it added 65,000 immigrant children to its schools in 1992-93, and 46,000 in 1991-92.

This issue of immigration's cost is rather complicated. The immigrant population, despite the popular image, is not one of greater needs and lesser capacities than the American population. Rather, the immigrants are divided between those who come in with educational and work qualifications higher than those of the average American (most of the Asians) and those who come in with educational and work qualifications lower than those of the average American (mostly Hispanics and people from Caribbean countries).



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And even within these large categories there are great differences by national origin. Some groups show a higher proportion on welfare than the American average (though almost none shows as high a proportion as American blacks and Puerto Ricans), some show a considerably lower proportion. Immigrants work and provide money to cities, states and the federal government in taxes. Many work in hospitals as doctors and nurses and technicians, provide health services in underserved areas, do important research and teaching in universities and colleges. So how do we reckon up the balance? And is this the balance we should reckon?

In our efforts to determine just what kind of immigration policy we should have, we resort eagerly to the calculations of economists. But there is no clear guidance there. Julian Simon claims that people are always an economic asset: increasing the number of people increases the numbers of consumers and producers. Other economists are doubtful that labor with poor qualifications is much of a benefit. Some point out that low-wage industries (garment manufacturing, for example) would go overseas in even greater proportion without low-paid immigrant labor. Others argue it should: Why is the most advanced economy in the world holding on to industries that have to compete with low-wage, developing countries? Some wonder who will provide service in restaurants and hotels, clean office buildings, take care of the children of high-paid professionals. Others point out that Japan manages to run hotels and restaurants with very few immigrants.

I have concluded that economics in general can give no large answer as to what the immigration policy of a nation should be. At the margin, one would think, where the good effects clearly are evident, economic considerations must prevail. But I recall an Australian economist confidently pronouncing the end of the Japanese miracle in a talk in Tokyo in 1962. Why? Because Japan could not or would not, for reasons of culture or xenophobia, import labor, as Europe was then doing, and labor shortages would call a halt to Japanese economic growth. Clearly, he had it wrong. The Japanese did not import labor, but did manage to maintain phenomenal economic growth.

But if not economics, then what? Politics? Culture? Here we move on to murky and dangerous ground. Thinking of the economist's comments on Japan in the 1960s, and contrasting suspicious and closed Japan with open Europe, then recruiting Yugoslavs and Turks, one wonders whether Europeans would now agree that their course was better. Immigration and the fates of the workers recruited from distant cultures and their children have become a permanent part of Europe's politics, spawning an ugly nativism there similar to that which closed America's borders in the 1920s.

This is no argument for the United States in its thinking about immigration, one might say. We are used to greater differences than the more homogeneous countries of Europe. We are a nation based not on a common ethnic stock linked by mystic cords of memory, connection, kinship, but rather by common universal ideas. But I am not sure how deeply rooted this view is among Americans in general. We all know the power of the sense of kinship, real or mythical, in keeping people together—or in tearing them apart. (This possibility is exacerbated by our affirmative action policies, which, while designed to advance those American racial and ethnic groups that have suffered from and suffer still from discrimination, are not limited to citizens or legal residents.)

The present-day restrictionist movement deploys the economic arguments, but it is the others that really drive it. Much of its current modest strength comes

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from the heirs of the Zero Population Growth movement and from environmentalists who argue that there are already too many Americans. But an equally strong motivation of the movement comes from the sense that there was—is—an American culture that is threatened by too great diversity. It is harder to make this argument publicly, for obvious reasons, since the question comes up: How do you define this American culture? Should it be or remain Christian or white or European?

The two kinds of argument are closely related. There are many Americans who regret the loss of a less crowded country and a more homogeneous culture. We are too prone to label them racists. There are indeed racists, and bigots, and the restrictionist movement will undoubtedly attract them in number. Yet the motives I have pointed to among the current restrictionists, an attachment to a country more like what it once was, a preference for a less populated country, are not ignoble.

We go very far these days in testing motives for racism, if their effect is to bear differentially on ethnic and racial groups. It is true that a lower level of immigration, more preference for those with needed skills, a spin in favor of the "underrepresented," would all mean more Europeans, fewer Hispanics and Caribbeans and Asians. But the effects of such policies are not an index to the motives of those who advocate them. Nor would I call a motive that would prefer an immigrant stream closer in racial and ethnic character to the present composition of the American population necessarily racist. In British immigration law there is a category of "patrials"—persons born of British stock in other countries whose status is defined by ancestry, connection to Britain through parents or grandparents. In Germany, people of German origin, no matter how distant, have claims to immigration others do not. Israel has its "law of return"—which was the ground on which the country was labeled "racist." I would not describe any of these policies as racist: there is a difference between recognizing those who are in some sense one's own, with links to a people and a culture, and a policy based on dislike, hostility, racial antagonism.

One other element should be mentioned as making up part of the immigration restriction movement. One finds in it children of immigrants, and immigrants themselves, who admire the ability of America to assimilate immigrants and their children, but who fear that the assimilatory powers of America have weakened, because of the legal support to bilingualism in education and voting, because of the power of multicultural trends in education. It is easy to accuse such people of wanting to pull up the drawbridge after they have gained entry. They would answer that they fear the United States is no longer capable of assimilating those now coming as it assimilated them.

Is this a fair argument, or have the aging immigrants of the last great European wave and their children who may be found active in immigration restriction simply adopted the nativist prejudices of those who tried to bar them? But it *is* a different country: less self-confident, less willing to impose English and American customs and loyalty as simply the best in the world. We do not know whether this change in national mood and in educational philosophy and practice actually affects the rate at which immigrants assimilate, and much would depend on giving an answer as to what we mean by assimilation. Learning English? I do not think the new immigrants learn English at a slower rate than the older European immigrants. Taking up citizenship? This has always varied depending on the ethnic group. One sees the same variation among current immigrants, and if fewer become citizens one reason may be that there are now fewer advantages to citizenship as civil rights law spreads to protect aliens.

One even finds some anti-immigrant sentiment among the newest, post-1965 immigrants. This sentiment is directed primarily at illegal immigrants: it is exacerbated by the fact that there may be competition for jobs between older legal and newer illegal immigrants working at the same jobs. They may also share the same section of the city, and the older immigrants may see the new illegals contributing to neighborhood decline.

In time, American blacks may be numbered among the restrictionists. If there is indeed competition between immigrants, legal or illegal, and Americans, blacks are likely to be more affected than any other group. Up to now, the dream of the Rainbow Coalition has kept black members of Congress in the pro-immigration camp. I doubt that this reflects the dominant view among blacks.

My sense is that the state of American public opinion is now modestly restrictionist. The scale of immigration is larger than most people would choose, for a host of reasons: they don't think America should become a country of mass immigration again, and see no good reason, economic or other, for this. They ask why the stream of immigration should be so unrepresentative of the nation that already exists. They support the need to admit refugees. They are against illegal immigration, even though they may benefit from the services of such immigrants. They think immigration policies should reflect our compassion (refugees), our respect for human rights (asylum seekers), the desire of immigrant neighbors to bring in parents, children and spouses, perhaps some brothers and sisters. They believe immigration policies should reflect our desire to improve the country—more of the kind of immigrants who become high-school class valedictorians and win science prizes.

That is about where I come out, too. There is no blueprint here, only a list of preferences that are not disreputable and should be respected. Whatever our policies are, however, I think our biggest problem will be to carry them out in a world in which so many see entry into the United States as a way of improving themselves.

How different would that be from what we have?

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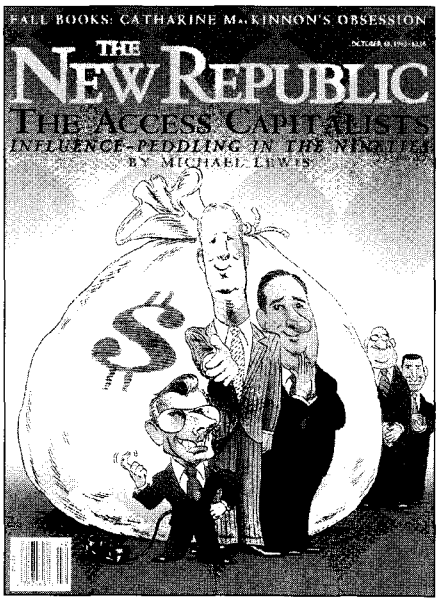

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When one considers present immigration policies, it seems we have insensibly reverted to mass immigration, without ever having made a decision to do so. Few Americans believe our population is too low, our land too lightly settled, our resources unexploited, our industries and commerce short of labor. But our policies, the result of various pressures operating within a framework of decent and generous ideals, end up looking as if we believe all this is true. The pressures consist of recent immigrants who want to bring in family members (no small group—there were 8 million immigrants in the 1980s), agricultural interests that want cheap labor, a Hispanic caucus that believes any immigration restriction demeans Hispanics, foreign policy interests that require us to take a substantial number of refugees, civil rights groups that expand the rights of illegal immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

These interests are not necessarily distinguishable from ideals of generosity toward those in desperate need, compassion for those who simply seek a country with more opportunity, respect for a tradition, rather recently reminted, that asserts we are a nation of immigrants, should remain so and should be proud of it.

The fulfillment of these ideals does not, however, suggest that there are any moral and ethical imperatives that dictate we have no right to make the decision that the United States, as it stands, with all its faults, is what we prefer to the alternative that would be created by mass immigration. The United States can survive without large numbers of low-skilled workers, and would probably survive, if it was so inclined, without highly trained foreign engineers, doctors, scientists. At the level of the highest skills and talents we will undoubtedly always be happy to welcome immigrants—we did even in the restrictive '30s and '40s. In a world in which masses of people can move, or be moved, too easily beyond their native borders, we will always need policies to set limits as to what the responsibilities of this country are.

There is one kind of immigration restriction on which all (in theory) agree, and that is control of illegal immigration. Much would be required to stem it, and the 1986 act did not. We would need identity documents more resistant to forgery, more Border Patrol officers, better qualified investigators of claims to asylum and much more. The effort to control illegal immigration will be expensive if it is to be effective. We may be able to learn from the European countries now trying to stem illegal immigration. A stronger effort to reduce illegal immigration may serve as a prelude to a more effective immigration regime generally, and that will be task enough for the next few years. Or we may discover in the effort that such control requires measures that we simply don't want to live with. It will be valuable to learn that, too.

NATHAN GLAZER is the author of *Ethnic Dilemmas*, editor of *Clamor at the Gates: The New American Immigration* and co-editor of *The Public Interest*.

Brooklyn's immigrant renewal.

SUNSET, SUNRISE

By Roger Rosenblatt

The two largest expanses in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn are the sky and the cemetery, which the residents see as their natural limits. Since the early seventeenth century, when the Dutch sailed into the area, one immigrant group after another has either made it in Sunset Park or died trying, often violently. Even the earliest Anglo-Americans died violently here, in the Battle of Long Island, which was fought (and lost) in the summer of 1776 on the ridge at Sixth Avenue, on the site of the twenty-four-acre park after which the neighborhood is named. Nearby to the north lies Greenwood Cemetery, 478 acres and one of the largest and oldest public burial grounds in the country. In terms of valuable real estate, the dead of Sunset Park leave the living in the dust. Among the half million elegantly interred are Currier and Ives, Samuel F. B. Morse, Peter Cooper, Henry Ward Beecher, Boss Tweed, Horace Greeley, Lorillard the tobacco man and Tiffany the jeweler. It was once said that a New Yorker's ideal life consisted of a mansion on Fifth Avenue, an office on Wall Street and a plot in Greenwood. But it was not said by people in Sunset Park.

Slightly more than a mile wide and 2.6 miles long, Sunset Park is bounded by Sixty-Fifth Street to the south, by Seventeenth Street to the north, by Eighth Avenue to the east and by New York Bay to the west. The surrounding neighborhoods, notably, gentrified Park Slope and middle-class Bay Ridge, are much better-off than Sunset Park. More than a quarter of its approximately 115,000 people live in households below the poverty line. The median income is $10,200. Large families crowd into two- and three-story houses. These low-built structures give scale to Sunset Park, and permit the sky to overwhelm one's view from the height of the ridge. Below lies the rectangle of the neighborhood, a grid of wide avenues and narrow side streets. Beyond, across the water, are the financial towers of lower Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty.

The Irish were the first true immigrants to come to Sunset Park, in the 1850s. They were followed by the Scandinavians, the Germans, the Italians and the Poles, who found work on the waterfront. By 1910 Norwegians and Finns dominated the area; the Finns, who were carpenters, colonized "Finn Town" and built their own houses. Other groups followed: Greeks and Russians, mostly Jews, who became store owners. The Puerto

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Ricans, who were not technically immigrants but who arrived with all the attributes, came in the 1950s.

Beginning in the 1970s, the people arrived who, along with Puerto Ricans, constitute Sunset Park's main population today: Dominicans, Mexicans, Ecuadorans, Colombians, Cubans; Middle Easterners—Jordanians, Egyptians and Lebanese; many Asians, mainly Chinese from Hong Kong, but also mainland Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Pakistanis and East Indians.

The poorest of these live west of Third Avenue near the waterfront beneath the elevated Gowanus Expressway, one of Robert Moses's yellow brick roads out of the inner city, which shadows Third Avenue like a black millipede. Drug addicts and prostitutes hang out there around the topless bars and "adult" video stores. The waterfront itself is part industrial park, part wasteland. The defunct piers, from which all of America's troops took off for Europe in World War II, jut into the water in twisted metal heaps, resembling the skeletons of scorched animals.

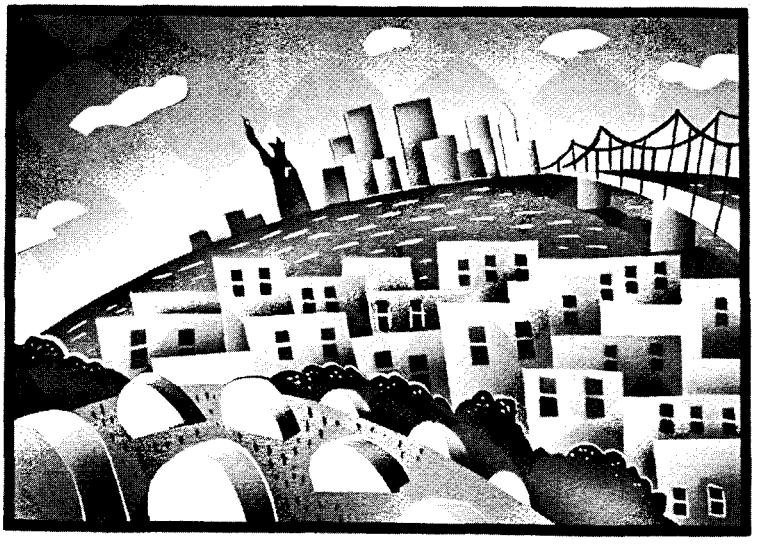

ILLUSTRATION BY MILAN TRENC FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Asians generally live in the farthest corner away from all that, on Eighth Avenue, where they established a Chinatown of shops in the '50s and '60s near stores whose signs still bear Norwegian, Irish, Jewish and Italian names. Middle Easterners are scattered along Fourth Avenue. Hispanics are spread out everywhere. People live mainly on the side streets: in tenements; in brick-and-masonry houses with little gardens out front, where they grow everything, including corn; and in still-attractive brownstones with elaborate cornices, high stoops and black iron banisters that end in tight fists.

Like their predecessors, the new immigrants came to Sunset Park and to America to find work, though there was much less available; to establish and rear families; and, in some cases, to escape political oppression. Most of them fear crime and drugs, which are rife in Sunset Park, though they concede that many of their own have brought crime and drugs with them. Most, too, are strong advocates of family cohesion, though some have seen their own families disintegrate in America, and realize that they have entered a civilization where families have been coming apart for decades. Most have retained formal religion. Most are dismayed at the quality of the schools; and most have no use for bilingual education.

In other words, the new arrivals in Sunset Park, who represent the more than 8 million new arrivals in America over the past three decades, are not terribly different from their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century counterparts. They are different in color. They are different in that they entered a welfare state. And they are different in that there are so many of them. Yet they have many of the same attitudes and racial prejudices of the earlier immigrants. And, as I found in speaking with them, they are no different in their ambitions. Most of them, like their predecessors, are for closing the golden door behind them.

Despite all this, they are accused by many observers, and, according to national polls, by most Americans, of being bad for the country. After spending a month last summer talking with them in Sunset Park, I concluded that they are quite good for the country. I was more often left wondering how good the country is for them.

"When I was a girl in Dominican, the dream I had of America was Bambi's forest. A little cottage, friendly people and Bambi, of course, since I saw the movie—Bambi my personal playmate. That all went away fast when I got to Sunset Park. In Dominican we were poor, but we lived in a big country house; we had land, fruit and vegetables. When I joined my brothers and sisters here, the apartment was so small, we fought for space. So I was never really close with them, or them with me. They felt I was here to take something away from them. Maybe I was. And then the dream was killed for good this summer—what happened to Frankie." She fights back tears.

Anna, 33, a social worker in Sunset Park, is married to Carlo, who works in a grocery store; they have a baby daughter. A small woman, more tan than dark, she has calm eyes and a mobile face. She arrived here from the Dominican Republic when she was 13. Her parents had come before her, in the mid-'60s. Of their six children, Anna is the third oldest. The youngest, Frankie, was 22 when he was shot to death last July by a robber who broke into his apartment in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. We sit together at the top of a stoop on a late summer morning, staring into the still haze. The street is empty, except for a shirtless drunk lying across the hood of a car.

"Until Frankie's murder I was beginning to think of myself as American, of living here forever. Now, I'd just as soon go back. Everything's been colored by his death."

"You mean that you would pack up and leave the country because of that?" I ask.

"It isn't only that. Carlo [who is also Dominican]

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would go. Even my father, who is as loyal to America as a man can get says that he's planning to go back. There's too much violence here. Look at Frankie. A boy killed because somebody wanted a T.V. or a microwave. And that's *Florida.* Heaven compared to Sunset Park."

The day I talked with Anna a wake was held in a neighborhood funeral home for two young sisters, ages 15 and 4, who had died in a firebombing two nights before. The rumor was that their father was the target of a rival gang, but he was out when the bomb was tossed through his window. The father's gang showed up at the wake.

"I know that my own countrymen are responsible for a lot of the crime around here," says Anna, "but they aren't the majority of us. The other Dominicans I work with are as afraid of the criminals as anyone else. They don't think of them as Dominicans, just criminals." She chuckles. "My mother says, 'You know what's wrong with this country? They let everybody in!'

"Look. My parents came to work and raise a family. I wanted the same things. Now I just want to feel safe. Forget Bambi. Just safe." She thinks a moment, then says, "Oh, I don't know. Maybe this is all about Frankie. There's a lot I love about this country. And I definitely would have my child, or children, grow up here."

"Why is that?"

"Because they're exposed to so much. I only wish there was less of a fight all the time. I know it sounds strange, but until Frankie our family was never touched by violence. We lived in the middle of it in Sunset Park, but we went about our business, went to church. We managed. Then this happened. When it did, I told my father: '*Now* we're part of America.' "

Enriqué is a 41-year-old fifth-grade math teacher. Like Anna, he is from the Dominican Republic, but he came here only a few years ago, and he grew up in Santo Domingo, not the countryside. An "economic refugee," as he calls himself, he packed up with his wife and three young sons, headed for New York and wound up in Sunset Park.

He is seated in a classroom at P.S. 314, a typically characterless whitish brick structure between Third and Fourth Avenues. Outside the classroom, kids in a summer program whoop and yell, playing games in the halls. Enriqué sits up straight at a child-size table. He is almost nerve-rackingly neat, with his close-cropped dark hair, trimmed mustache and round goatee the size of a quarter. He has a tenor's voice; from time to time he tenses up and makes a fist.

I ask him, "Are the students here better or worse than in the Dominican Republic?"

"There's a big difference. The kids here don't care. In Santo Domingo you have to be dedicated to come to school. I teach math, and nobody cares. It scares me—for the students, and for my own kids, too. My boys are dedicated now, but in a few years, who knows?"

He is especially concerned about bilingualism, which is pushed not by immigrants but by local politicians seeking to build non-English-speaking constituencies. "I want [my boys] to learn English. But here, in this area, they want them to learn Spanish. It's funny, really. I, who know so little English, want my sons to learn English. And others, who speak English perfectly, want to keep them learning in Spanish. What's the point of learning in Spanish?" He tenses up. "This is America."

The schools in Sunset Park are in bad shape, but not because of the new immigrants. In P.S. 314 there are but 151 immigrant students, representing twenty-four countries, out of a total school population of 1,200. The better neighborhood educators believe that the schools will only get better if more immigrants enroll. The immigrants themselves have improved the area's intellectual life. Until the Asians moved in there was not a single bookstore; now there are two. The general level of education is so low that the immigrants are the last thing the schools should worry about.

I ask Enriqué: "Is it the system or the individuals who drag down the education?"

"Both," he says. "The system is too lax. Kids do not want to get ahead. Parents don't encourage them. And it's not as if they're strangers here. They're Americans."

His complaint goes wider than education. New immigrants are astonished at the general absence of a work ethic. For anyone not an economist, it is hard to tell if the new immigrants have hurt the labor market or not. And even the economists' arguments cancel out one another. But as far as attitudes toward work are concerned, most immigrants in Sunset Park border on the zealous.

Though it could never be considered anything but a very poor neighborhood, Sunset Park has actually improved economically since the arrival of the new immigrants. It had slumped to its postwar nadir between 1960 and 1970, when nearly 60 percent of the families below the poverty line were headed by women with young children, and 22 percent of the households were on public assistance.

However, by the mid-1980s, reports Louis Winnick, an urban economist, in his book *New People in Old Neighborhoods,* "Sunset Park was nestled in the curl of a rebounding wave." The value of real estate rose, and dipped again with the recession of the early 1990s, but not to the earlier low levels. Houses were refurbished. No chic young middle-class businesses sprouted—no Pottery Barns or Banana Republics—but Asians, Hispanics and Middle Easterners set up plenty of shops, like bakeries, electronics stores and toy shops on Fifth Avenue.

An-mei, who is 36, came from Canton two years ago, and has worked in a sewing factory ever since. Her apartment consists of a short, grim hallway and two average-size rooms at the top of a steep flight of stairs in a tenement on Fifth. She lives with her husband, who also works in a sewing factory, and their 9-year-old daughter. The rooms are cleaned as well as they can be without a total overhaul, and neat, except for a roll of open toilet paper on a card table. There are stains on the sallow walls and scuff marks on the baseboards.

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"I am embarrassed to have you in my home," says An-mei. "But the rent is cheap—$150 a month."

She sits on a jerry-built bench and is dressed in a red shirt, green slacks and pink slippers. She looks athletic and wears her black hair in bangs. Her face is energetic, her voice loud.

"Do you like your work?" I ask this picturing sweatshops—airless, secret holes where pitiless bosses drive workers like slaves. Undoubtedly there are such places in Sunset Park. But there are also factories, like An-mei's, that appear no different from any well-kept, responsible business establishment. The women sit at sewing machines at comfortable distances from one another. The places are well-lit and well-ventilated. Nor are they hidden. I saw several factories, which I visited unannounced, with large working rooms visible from the street. An-mei works ten to twelve hours a day.

"I don't like my work," she says. "I like the *money*. I pay my taxes, I pay my rent. We don't take vacations. We save. And I'm not special. I'm typical."

Other Asians in the neighborhood sound no different discussing their work than any middle Europeans of the 1920s—the same mixture of purposefulness and humorless ambition. A Korean couple that runs a successful deli on Fourth Avenue; a Vietnamese family that opened a thriving restaurant on Fifth; a 66-year-old retired Chinese civil engineer whose three children are a teacher, a computer scientist and a fast-food restaurant operator—they all say the same things about work and getting ahead.

The civil engineer, who has lived under several forms of government in China, tempers his enthusiasm with a wan observation: "The competitive system here is fine for the young but not for the old. The old are left behind. Everyone is too busy. And they—the Chinese, I mean—they look down on you if you don't have money. That would never happen in China."

"Know why I still sound Vietnamese, after all these years? Because I deliberately held on to that sound. I did not want to let go. It has less to do with the way others perceive me than with the way I see myself. I came here at the age of 13, in 1975, as a refugee, so I had no choice about my country. But I always have the choice of how I feel inside, and inside I feel just as Asian as American, maybe more."

Trinh, who is a reporter for a Chinese-language newspaper, and I walk on Eighth Avenue, past the sewing factories, a Buddhist storefront temple and the food shops, such as Yat Sing Take-Out, Young's Meat and the Sam Wah market. The grapefruit and oranges that spill out in wooden bins in front of the markets are so bright they seem lit from the inside.

"So now, after all these years, how do you think of yourself?" I ask her.

"I am one-third Vietnamese, one-third Chinese, one-third American. I actually know more about the Chinese culture than [about] the Vietnamese, because in the Asian community here it is more useful to speak Chinese. A few years ago, I felt so out of place in America that I went back to Vietnam. I stayed a year. I knew it was impossible to lead a life there. But I'm not sure that it's possible to lead a life here, either."

"Where, then, would you feel at home?" I ask her. She merely shrugs and bows her head.

That newcomers think of themselves as having a foot in two countries is different from the earlier waves of immigrants, and the difference is significant. One explanation for the thinking of many of them is that since they were not refugees seeking asylum, it makes perfect sense for them to act on longings for home whenever they are ready. A Russian Jew hounded out of his country at the turn of the century had no home to return to. A Mexican or a Dominican can easily fly home again.

The fact that a great many of the new immigrants do not assimilate is especially troubling. One wonders, however, how much assimilation is possible in modern America. To be sure, certain groups, such as the Chinese and the Hasidic Jews, have never chosen to fully blend into American society. But in the past, most groups did make that choice. Yet they did so at a time when the idea of common purpose was promoted in the schools and mirrored in movies and institutions. Today, when every major business enterprise is international, when money is international, when instant international experiences are pictured on T.V., more people think of themselves as world citizens. Why should not immigrants do likewise?

Taking advantage of both the sunset and the park one summer evening, I ask Anna to stand with me on its hill, the neighborhood's highest point, to look down over the roofs, chimneys and T.V. antennas, then beyond to the statue in the water, and to tell me what she sees. It is one of those surrealistically beautiful New York nights—the pollution streaking the sky blood red and purple, the sun melting like an egg.

She surveys the neighborhood below us. "I've always liked Sunset Park," she says. "I grew up knowing everyone on the block. My boyfriend was from Ecuador, my best friend from Peru. Even if it's more dangerous now, it's still all right." She pauses, looking around.

"I used to be afraid of the amount of choices Americans have," she says, "and I still am. It's overwhelming. But look there." She indicates Sixth Avenue. "If I want to get to that bodega on the corner, I can walk straight down the hill. Or, if I choose, I can take any one of those winding paths, to the right or to the left. And something terrible may happen to me if I take one route or the other. Or, something terrible may happen if I stand still, and I may wind up in Greenwood." She glances in the direction of the cemetery. "But something wonderful may happen to me, too. In any event, it's my choice."

"Still thinking of going back?" I ask.

"Dominicans have a crazy superstition," she says. "I don't know where it came from. They say: 'If you fall in the snow in America, you'll never leave.' I probably fell in the snow." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

The Hustlers

More than most directors, Fred Schepisi resists classification. He first drew wide attention with *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, made in his native Australia, which was close to a heroic tragedy of the aborigine condition. (Schepisi's rendition of aborigine life and antipodean forests makes *The Piano* look even wetter.) He came to the United States to do a Western, *Barbarosa*, then moved to sci-fi with *Iceman*. Then came *Plenty* with Meryl Streep, *Roxanne* with Steve Martin and, back in Australia, *A Cry in the Dark*, again with Meryl Streep. Then he moved to Le Carré country with *The Russia House*.

Certainly other directors have had very varied careers. (John Ford once did a picture about a Jewish family in the New York ghetto.) Still, if Schepisi is not unique, his range is nonetheless impressive. Now he soars right into the middle of Manhattan high life with **Six Degrees of Separation** (MGM), John Guare's screenplay derived from his play.

Schepisi brings to it torrential brio, dexterous juggling of time strands, an insistence on camera movement as the soul of film dynamics. With the candid yet friendly lighting of Ian Baker, who has been his cinematographer from the beginning, Schepisi makes posh New York look like a glittering box of lovely adult toys. However, the stern reward of all these virtues is that Guare's work is made even more puzzling here than it was on stage.

The story is based on fact. Into the voluptuous Fifth Avenue apartment of Flanders and Ouisa Kittredge, a silky art dealer and his wife, intrudes a black youth with a (superficial) knife wound. He claims to be a friend of their children at Harvard and says he has just been mugged in Central Park across the street. He is well-spoken, well-dressed. In the course of the talk as they care for him, he sort of lets slip that he's the son of Sidney Poitier. This excites the Kittredges in a suave, snooty way, as it does a South African tycoon who is their guest. The youth then proceeds to make dinner for them all, fabulously, and is invited to spend the night. The South African is so warmed by the evening that he goes in on a big deal with Kittredge.

In the morning the Kittredges discover that, during the night, the youth has brought in a male hustler whom they find in bed with him. Outraged, they throw out both young men and, panic-stricken, search the treasure-laden apartment for theft. Nothing was taken. Soon they learn from other couples, friends of theirs, that the youth is a faker who has pulled similar scams on them.

This is, effectively, where the play ends. Almost everything thereafter, until the very end, is explanation and corroboration. The Kittredge children, though hostile to their parents, help find the source of the youth's information about the family and their friends. There's a sidebar story about a struggling young SoHo couple whose lives he wrecks. And there's a pathetic conclusion in which the youth appeals to the Kittredges to help him with the police. But there's no true structural unity to the work. Most of what happens after the opening episode is like a series of appendices to a text. In fact, to introduce the finale, which he recounts at a dinner party, Kittredge even says, "There *is* one last chapter which happened the other night." This isn't light-handed dramatic structure: it's amiable meandering.

But that's not what is basically puzzling about *Six Degrees*. After the opening episode, Ouisa Kittredge is plagued by attempts to find a meaning in it. She seems to act as vicar for Guare, trying to find a theme in his play. The initial incident (suggested by a news story) obviously captivated Guare, gave him a dramatic lift-off. Then it's as if he had to find some thematic reason for using it, as if he were being punished for his first fascination, like an amorist having to be serious after a fling. Ouisa, in the middle of the work, does his burrowing for him.

She (Guare, that is) tries several stratagems. One has to do with the Kandinsky that the Kittredges own. It's a double painting, on both sides of the canvas. "One side is geometric and somber. The other side is wild and vivid." These two sides, to Ouisa, signify chaos and control. She repeats these words at the end, as she walks up Park Avenue, as if she had just found what she has been looking for. But it's not clear what she has found. Did the youth represent chaos as against the Kittredges' control? Or is there chaos and control in everyone? Neither of these points is drama-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

A Dangerous Woman. *Debra Winger gives a lovely, empathic, rounded performance as a not quite mentally competent woman who is seduced. The story, etc., don't much matter, but Winger's fine work ought not to be missed. (Reviewed 12/20/93)* **The Remains of the Day.** *The screenplay bruises the subtlety of the novel, but Anthony Hopkins is marvelous as the butler, the mainstay of the manse, and Emma Thompson's housekeeper certainly helps. (12/6/93)* **Schindler's List.** *Steven Spielberg, of all people, re-creates the Kraków ghetto of 1943 with imaginative skill and affecting commitment. Liam Neeson storms through as Schindler, the German entrepreneur-savior; Ben Kingsley survives wonderfully as his Jewish accountant. (12/13/93)* **A Streetcar Named Desire.** *With some previously censored footage. Brando's performance is titanic, but Williams's masterwork, even with the restorations, is still compromised. (11/29/93)* **—SK**

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tized. The phrase is just a sententious motto to give a final flourish of meaning to the film.

There are other attempts at meaning. Ouisa has just left a dinner party before the Park Avenue epiphany, where she had been discussing that "last chapter." She had exploded in a speech in which she said she didn't want the experience with the black youth to become merely an anecdote in her life: she wants it to remain an experience. This distinction between experience and anecdote would carry more weight if we had seen any depth in the experience. What did she learn? That there are people more needy than she is? That some of them are clever con men? In any case, how does that experience lead to the chaos-and-control mantra?

And there's the title. In the course of the film Ouisa says she has read somewhere that there are only six degrees of separation between any two people on earth. This means that every person on earth is connected with every other person on earth with only six intervening people. "The president of the United States" knows someone who knows someone, on through four more someones, who connects him with "a gondolier in Venice." But what in the world does this putative fact have to do with this play/film? Is it supposed to link the youth's hustling with the Kittredge's million-dollar hustling of art? If so, why six degrees? If not, whence the title? It comes to sound like one more bit of reading that stimulated Guare, that he put in his play and then strove to make relevant.

Add to these thematic scramblings the question of credibility. We're asked to believe that, three months earlier, this black youth was a common street hustler in Boston who was taken home by an MIT student (friend of the Kittredge children), and that in three months he became a well-spoken, elegant bon vivant, versed in literature and painting, poised, capable of cooking an exquisite meal, sufficiently steeped in data about the Kittredges and their friends to dupe them. (The MIT youth, swooning over him, had given him the facts that he needed.) Sociopaths, such as the black youth seems to be, sometimes behave phenomenally, but this...?

What gives the play/film some degree of texture (though not six) is Guare's dialogue. He writes so lightly and brightly, his touch is so deft and whimsical, so intelligent, that his dialogue acts on us much the way the black youth's smooth talk affected the Kittredges. We assume that a person who writes so well must know what he's doing, that the improbabilities are possible, that the pronouncements of theme have some depth. But, as the tinkle and slash of the dialogue fade, we find that there isn't much there. The mouth was quicker than the mind.

Guare and Schepisi are immensely helped by Stockard Channing, whom I've admired ever since *The Fortune* (1975). In Ouisa she has her best role so far, and she spins it with high-comedy finesse. Donald Sutherland gives the art dealer all the creaminess he needs. Ian McKellen, as the South African tycoon, is crisp. Will Smith, the black youth, is satisfactory, but he seems a bit breathless throughout, as if the director kept saying, "Pick up the pace."

A last word for the editor, Peter Honess, who has worked with Schepisi before. Honess slices the continually intermingled time-planes and settings like a diamond cutter. He helps to keep the film sparkling, helps to delay our discovery that the gem is rhinestone. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

The Great Work Falters

At the conclusion of *Millennium Approaches*, the first part of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, an angel crashes through the ceiling of Prior Walter's bedroom and announces: "The Great Work Begins." At the start of Part II, titled **Perestroika**, a doddering Bolshevik complains that humankind cannot function without the equivalent of Marxist theory. *Perestroika* makes a heroic, if partly ironic, effort to furnish that alternative theory through the conception of a totally sexualized universe. But despite its admirable ambitions and for all its extraordinary qualities, *Perestroika* seems more a repetition than a culmination of the Great Work promised by the initial design.

Like *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika* is alive with fierce intelligence and sharp scenes. It contains the same engrossing

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conflicts and engaging central characters. A kind of extraterrestrial soap opera (akin to "Twin Peaks"), it continues to mix reality and dreams—personal relationships and supernatural shenanigans—in a dazzling display of style. It features the wittiest writing, and brightest sensibility, of any play in memory. But it not only has little in the way of structure, it also lacks the important dramatic component of a central action, or animating event, to push it forward. Most serious, it fails to prove its thematic premise, that an insistently homosexual perspective can be the basis for a universal worldview.

Even more than *Millennium Approaches*, *Perestroika* looks at politics and metaphysics almost entirely through the prism of sex and interpersonal transactions. The ailing Prior Walters ejaculates when the Angel first descends, and experiences erection whenever she reappears. While she chants "*Ectasis in Excelsis*," he humps a sacred text (the stage direction reads: "If they had cigarettes, they'd smoke them now"). He learns that "Heaven is a city much like San Francisco," where many of the angels are gay or lesbians, engaging in perpetual copulation and producing a Protomatter (called "Angelic Spooj") that glues the universe together. Even Hannah, the stern mother of the gay Mormon, Joe Pitt, gets turned on to the point of orgasm by the lesbian angel. Similarly, Conservative Joe and Liberal Louis discuss their political differences while making out in Jacob Riis Park ("The more appalling I find your opinions the more I want to hump you," Louis admits), and Roy Cohn's reactionary politics are almost entirely explained by his being a closet queen.

Then there is the specter of AIDS, which surrounds this play like an evil miasma, with its attendant horrors of emergency rooms and I.V.s, diseased tissues, lesions, sarcomas, pneumonia and blindness. Though Prior is still alive at the end of the play, he and Cohn are dying of the disease throughout the long evening, inspiring Kushner to write at least four death scenes and two resurrections. (Cohn's dying is presided over by his archnemesis, Ethel Rosenberg, who later prompts Louis in his recitation of the kaddish over Cohn's body.) Kushner comes perilously close to suggesting that this plague is heaven-sent—not, as the fundamentalists would have it, as a punishment for sin, but as a sign of God's abandonment of humans around the time of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake (in heaven, Prior enjoins the angels to take this deadbeat Dad to court for desertion). Prior's refusal to despair, or to let us avert our face from this ghastly specter, are the qualities that anoint him as the Prophet of *Angels in America*.

In the conclusion, he, Louis and Belize are sitting near the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, presided over by a stone statue of another Angel. The Bethesda Angel is associated with healing properties, and when the millennium comes, all who are afflicted will be enabled to bathe in her fountain. After Prior and Louis argue over Gorbachev and perestroika, and Louis and Belize dispute the rights of Palestinians, Prior reflects on the scourge that is killing him, and his comments are worth quoting: "This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths any more. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time will come."

It is a moving statement on behalf of all who suffer the torments of this deadly affliction, and, for once, Kushner's mordant jests in the face of the horror modulate into pure feeling. But the swelling inspirational tone of his coda takes a sharp turn toward bathos with Prior's concluding lines, delivered directly to the audience: "Bye now. You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you. *More life.* The Great Work Begins." The "Bye now" is unfortunate enough. But unless Kushner is assuming that everybody in the theater is HIV-positive, there is more than a trace of audience-stroking in these curtain lines. To be blessed as "fabulous creatures" after watching three and a half hours of painful death scenes, sexual betrayals, corrupt politics and cynical metaphysics in a "terminally crazy and mean America" suggests that sentimentality is the down side of Kushner's rhetoric, just as high camping is the flip side of his wit. For every surprising conjunction of clauses or skillful interlapping of scenes, there is a vaudeville skit or a gay wisecrack to trigger the laugh machine. (Kushner has a particular weakness for gags about hairdressers and Fauberge cologne better left to the Theater of the Ridiculous.) Those frequent lapses prevent *Angels in America* from fulfilling its extraordinary potential, as does our growing realization that the play's length is less a sign of richness than of the author's incapacity to edit out repetitions or focus on an integrated action.

For the subject of AIDS does not readily accommodate itself to any single worldview. It is an appalling disease that has claimed many of our close friends in the arts, but it will not lend itself to metaphor any more than cancer or tuberculosis does, and it does not reduce itself to moral outrage any more than bubonic plague or syphilis does. "I am dying. Why doesn't somebody help us?" asked the *Times*'s Jeffrey Schmalz before he succumbed to AIDS himself. Who but an absent God can answer his heartbreaking question? Until a cure is found, the disease is real to us helpless humans less as a moral or political issue than as a particularly miserable and recalcitrant biological fact. Among the many AIDS plays, only Paul Rudnick's whimsical *Jeffrey* seems to recognize the practicalities of the problem, since it concerns a gay man who doesn't spend his time assigning blame but rather determines (though he fails) to stay celibate to save his life.

Kushner indicts his straight characters less for remaining indifferent to AIDS than for failing (*pace* Roy Cohn) to acknowledge their own homosexuality. And he condemns the gay world not for spreading the disease so much as for failing (*pace* Louis Ironson) to remain loyal to the friends who contract it. Personal loyalty and mutual support remain the highest values this author can imagine. Yet a pervasive sense of victimization wraps around his play like a shroud. The bleeding finger writes, and having writ, fails to move on.

My main criticism of George C. Wolfe's direction of *Millennium Approaches* is that it applies Broadway accessories to a serious play. Oddly, these values seem entirely appropriate to the more commercially inclined *Perestroika*. Robin Wagner's scene design is now considerably more modest, and therefore considerably more effective, than his sets for Part I, consisting of simple furniture strategies rather than large location pieces. And the extravagant acting fits better inside a play with large theatrical gestures. I found Ron Leibman's shrieking and kvetching Roy Cohn just as impressive in Part II of *Angels in America*, though he is still on the outlandish side of reality. His mercurial shifts in tone and volume, his incredible rattling pace, mark him as the only actor alive who can interrupt himself. Stephen Spinella's feverish, spasmodic, emaciated Prior Walter is still enormously affecting, and David Marshall Grant's Joe Pitt remains a model of tortured propriety. Ellen McLaughlin is compelling both as a butch nurse and as the gyrating calisthenic Angel, Jeffrey Wright is a marvelously bitchy Belize and Kathleen Chalfant is dignified in a variety of older male and female roles. Only Marcia Gay Harden's Harper Pitt remains embedded in sitcom, though Joe Mantello's Louis Ironson, vocally whiny and physically itchy, began to pall on me a little this time, too. But then the actor is charged with playing so many

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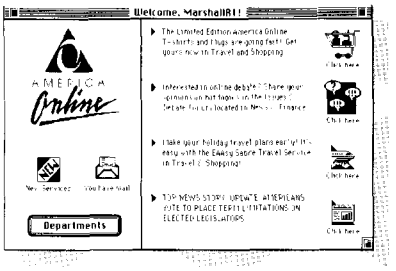

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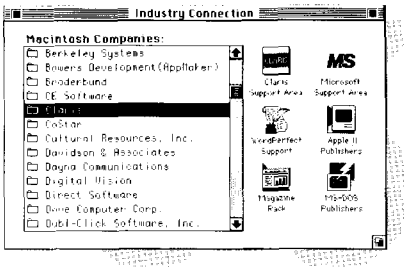

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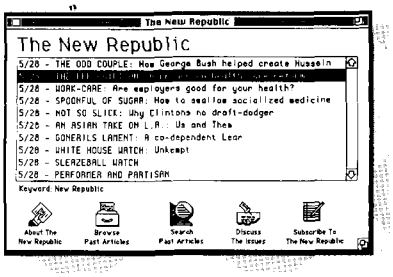
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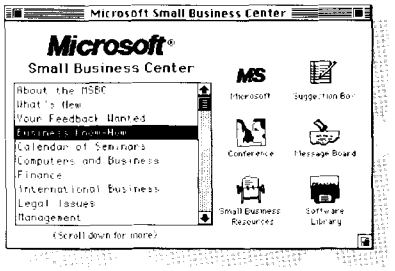

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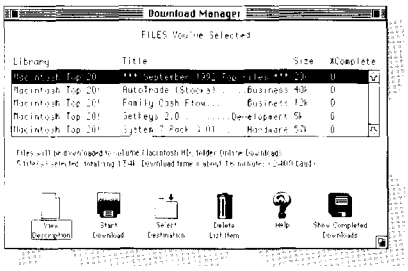

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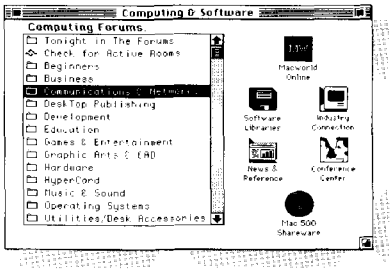

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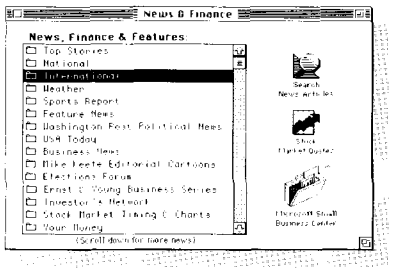

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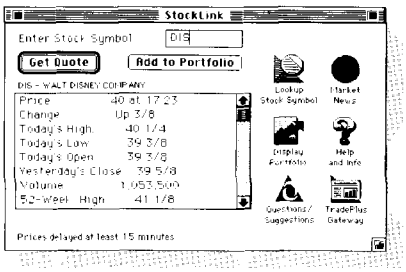

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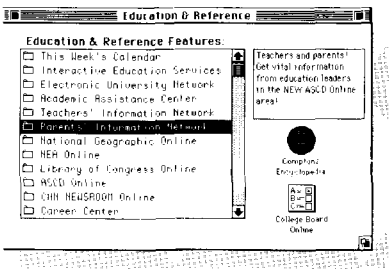

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sex scenes in front of an audience that he's probably a little strung out.

The Black Rider (at the Brooklyn Academy of Music) is the product of a most unlikely group of collaborators: the director-designer Robert Wilson, the author William Burroughs, the singer-composer Tom Waits and the Thalia Theater of Hamburg. It is nevertheless a masterpiece, unquestionably Robert Wilson's most accessible work of art, not to mention his funniest. Subtitled "The Casting of the Magic Bullets," the work is a modernistic adaptation of the old German folk tale that formed the basis for Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* (The Freeshooter) about a man who made a pact with the devil so as to become the marksman his sweetheart desired.

The text is an extremely personal statement by Burroughs. The magic bullets that enable his namesake, Wilhelm, to become a great hunter may well be a metaphor for the drugs that governed his early life. And the climax, when Wilhelm, shooting a dove at his own wedding, kills his fiancée by mistake, painfully recapitulates a scene from Burrough's life when he drunkenly shot his wife in imitation of another Wilhelm (Tell).

All the elements—the sets, the lights, the sound, the acting and Waits's scratchy songs—cohere into the making of a delightful avant-garde musical that may be the most electrifying contribution to the form since the Brecht-Weill *Seven Deadly Sins*, to which it bears some resemblance. After the crayon-titled curtain rises, a black trunk floats off the stage, upends and opens to admit all of the characters in the play, who are made up like the pasty-white-faced Somnambulist in *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. The perfectly controlled acting, half in English and half in German (supertitled for the latter), is a combination of silent film, circus, carnival, vaudeville, vampire movie and ghoul show techniques. It is also a decisive rebuke to those who believe that Wilson inhibits performers, for it is continually imaginative, comedic and ultimately very moving.

Certain images remain indelibly imprinted on the inner eye: an illuminated rifle that floats, flies, then sits on its own butt; another rifle that develops a mind of its own and chases an actor; Wilson's incredible palette of lighting effects, including a backdrop that continually changes color; a forest of expanding trees; the devil, Pegleg, a compere in red tails with a red light in his ear, walking on his toes; the heroine Katchen, in a dream sequence, coming upon a room full of dead game; characters moving in synchronized fashion to percussion accompaniment; Wilhelm killing ducks as if in a shooting gallery without even taking aim; and, finally, the spellbinding sequence when he shoots at a dove and Katchen sinks to the ground in a slow-motion roll.

After this, Wilhelm goes mad, removing his clothes and singing "Some Lucky Day," a rousing Jolson number that is somehow very sad. He re-enters the black trunk, joined by the rest of the company, which has also gone mad. Pegleg, the devil, with his diabolically angular face, is left to pick up a rose thrown on stage and to say an ironic goodbye to the rapt audience ("Nice to look and see all these beautiful faces ... Thank you, you're too kind"), before singing "The Last Rose of Summer." The evening adds up to a Faustian love story, told through an amalgam of popular forms. Except for an irrelevant Burroughs passage about how Hemingway sold the movie rights to "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," it is perfectly realized by all its contributors. It is, above all, exalted by the stagecraft of one of the great visual wizards of our time. •

False Witness

BY DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN

An Eye For An Eye: The Untold Story of Jewish Revenge Against Germans in 1945 by John Sack

(Basic Books, 252 pp., $23)

How might a book of "history" from a tabloid publishing house be made? It would have a suggestive title that conjures up, and appeals to, old prejudices: *An Eye For An Eye*, say, since it echoes an anti-Semitic cliché that contrasts the wrathful Jewish God to the merciful Christian God. It would have an explanatory subtitle that promises a shock, the revelation of something suppressed, the story of a crime or some other malfeasance on a grand scale: *The Untold Story of Jewish Revenge Against Germans in 1945* would do very well. The jacket copy of the book would offer a teaser of developments so astounding that no browser could pass it up. "The worst thing that happened to some Holocaust survivors was that they became like Nazis" would do the trick. It would have a sensational set of stories inside, riddled with exaggerations and misportrayals, and fundamentally misleading in their overall effect, but based on a nugget or two of truth. It would have an ostentatiously presented pseudo-scholarly apparatus of dense and bewildering endnotes, calculated to persuade most readers of the seriousness of the enterprise before them, and of the weight of the material behind the book's indictments. Fifty pages of notes, say, and fifteen pages listing sources, appended to 160 pages of text. To protect the author against the (truthful) charge of misrepresentation, our tabloid publisher's product would have to include, tucked away in the voluminous endnotes, scarcely noticeable disclaimers that contain some of the truth that the book's narrative systematically and colossally exaggerates and distorts. It would adorn itself, on its back cover, with a testimonial from a reputable historian (for example, Antony Polonsky) from a reputable university (for example, Brandeis University): "I am satisfied that the author is a serious researcher.... The book is in fact a major contribution to our understanding.... I certainly recommend publication." It would undoubtedly contain pronouncements from the author to the effect that his book is heroic, that it would have amounted to moral turpitude on his part to have sat on the unpleasant truths that he alone, the humble servant of the truth, has indefatigably unearthed. And finally it would have a lurid picture on its cover, a cleverly designed hook for a calumnious book dressed up as history.

The only one of all these twisting and vulgarizing elements that is missing from John Sack's book is the picture on the cover. All of the examples cited above are from his book, which strings together facts and pseudo-facts about individual Jews in the aftermath of the Holocaust with the effect of creating a sometimes subtle and sometimes not so subtle indictment of Jews in general. The book fails disgracefully in much of what it does present—misshapen stories and wild innuendo—and in all of what it does not present, namely a serious consideration of the context and the meaning of the events that it describes, and the analytical and moral concepts that it

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employs. Oh, and the tabloid publisher in question is Basic Books.

Sack's book tells us something about the sufferings of Germans during the months that followed the end of World War II. This suffering needs to be acknowledged. After the war, in the eastern parts of Germany that were occupied by Poland and eventually ceded to it, Poles set up internment camps for tens of thousands of Germans suspected of having committed crimes during the war. They also expelled several million Germans from these territories, so that the land could be settled by Poles and become securely Polish. Drawing on the testimony of perpetrators, victims and bystanders, including more than 300 hours of interviews, Sack describes the horrible treatment that Germans suffered, the murders of Germans and the typhus epidemics that claimed thousands of German lives. Again, the torments were great, and they deserve to be documented.

It is also true that some of the people serving in these postwar Polish institutions were Jews, and that some of these Jews committed crimes against Germans. The commander of the internment camp in Gleiwitz, Lola Potok Ackerfeld, on whom Sack concentrates a large part of his attention, was a 24-year-old Jewish survivor of Auschwitz. In Sack's account, which is based, he says, on extensive interviews with her and with those who knew her and served with her, the agony and the anger of this young woman led her to beat Germans and to allow her underlings to brutalize them further. Some of the treatment that Jews meted out to Germans, as described in the book, was blood-curdling and ought to have been severely punished. Some Jews, in sum, became murderers.

If Sack had told the story of German suffering, and of the small number of Jews who participated in its infliction, and also the story of how those Jews eventually decided to stop their participation, if he had told this story faithfully and without exaggeration or embellishment, then he would have produced a historical monograph that would have contributed, in a minor but real way, to our understanding of those terrible years. But a monograph would have been little noticed and little read. And so instead we have this book. There is nothing sober or learned about it. In no sense does its empirical basis justify its packaging; or the recent segment on "60 Minutes" about one of the book's characters, Solomon Morel, the former commander of the camp at Schwientochlowitz, which allowed Sack to air some of his more outrageous claims; or its sensa-

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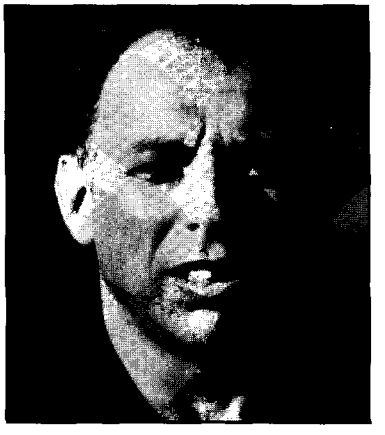

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tional portrait of Jews dominating Poland after the war and employing their allegedly vast power in a conspiratorial way to take revenge for their own recent sufferings by torturing and murdering innocent German men, women and children.

Sack calls this the "untold story of Jewish revenge against Germans in 1945." "Jewish" wrath, not the wrath of some individual Jews, is the central agent of his story. In Sack's overheated and stylized world, it was Jews who were greatly responsible for the crimes committed against these Germans, most of whom were innocent civilians. It was Jewish survivors of Auschwitz and other Nazi camps who formed the backbone of the Polish Office of State Security, the institution likened by Sack to the Gestapo, which masterminded and implemented this "Holocaust" of Germans. (Sack takes the word approvingly from an expelled woman from Gleiwitz.) Burning with hatred for things German, these Holocaust survivors, to quote the astounding first words of the book's jacket, "became like Nazis."

One of the many telling sections of Sack's book concerns the camp at Lamsdorf. He introduces the camp by telling us that its commander lost his parents and his siblings during the war and was himself a survivor of Auschwitz, where he contracted tuberculosis. According to Sack, this camp was set up as part of a program to remove Germans living in the surrounding region, which was to be resettled by Poles. The guards in Lamsdorf murdered in the most brutal ways, according to Sack, about 6,500 of the 8,000 Germans admitted into the camp. One of the book's most vivid and horrific descriptions applies to this camp. In Sack's account, the commander of the camp ordered the German women from the town of Grüben to dig up the bodies of hundreds of Poles whom the S.S. had killed during the war:

> The women did, and they started to suffer nausea as the bodies, black as the stuff in a gutter, appeared. The faces were rotten, the flesh was glue, but the guards—who had often seemed psychopathic, making a German woman drink urine, drink blood and eat a man's excrement, inserting an oily five-mark bill in a woman's vagina, putting a match to it—shouted at the women of Grüben, "Lie down with them!" "Make love with them!" and, with their rifles, pushed on the backs of the women's heads until their eyes, noses and mouths were deep in the Polish faces' slime. The women who clamped their lips couldn't scream, and the women who screamed had to taste something vile. Spitting, retching, the women at last stood up, the wet tendrils still on their chins, fingers, clothes, the wet seeping into the fibers, the stink like a mist around them as they marched back to Lamsdorf. There were no showers there, and the corpses had all had typhus, apparently, and sixty-four women of Grüben died.

This is as gruesome a story as one will find in the annals of the Holocaust. There is one problem with it, and with Sack's larger account of the camp: its protagonists were not Jewish.

Sack's narrative implies, about this camp and about many other places, that the deeds he discusses are to be inscribed in a ledger of "Jewish" revenge. By telling us that the commander was an Auschwitz survivor, Sack assures that most readers will assume that he was Jewish. By not discussing the identities of the guards of this camp (except to say suggestively that they had "Polish-sounding names"), he can rely on the reader to make the same false inference about them, especially in light of his frequent emphasis in the preceding pages on the grievous crimes of so many putatively Jewish guards. It is only in the notes, eighty pages away, at the end of an unnumbered paragraph that consists of a half-page list of meaningless names of witnesses with archival notations, that the unusually diligent reader will discover the identity of the commander at Lamsdorf: he was a Polish Catholic. And it is only in the middle of the previous paragraph of the endnotes that Sack himself admits that "I don't know if any guards at Lamsdorf were Jews." There is no reason to believe, in other words, that they were Jews. And there is no reason, therefore, to incorporate this story into this book, at least without a careful identification of the culprits and a consequent justification of this camp's inclusion in a book on "Jewish" revenge.

This technique, employed again and again, of suggesting in the main text that certain crimes were committed by Jews and burying a disclaimer in the notes, is just one of the many devices that are repeatedly used to paint a wildly out of focus and exaggerated portrait of "Jewish revenge." It should be noted that whenever a Jew was involved in some brutality, no matter how irrelevant to the deed this single aspect of his identity (and frequently Sack knows nothing more of the person than that he was a Jew, nothing of his life or motives), Sack leaps to identify him as a "Jewish guard," or simply as a "Jew." Yet he repeatedly leaves vague the identity of non-Jewish actors. Sack's account of the Lamsdorf camp should itself suffice to warrant the conclusion that his book aims more at myth than at history, more at defamation than at truth.

An Eye For An Eye contains one demonstrably misleading episode after another, written in the spirit of the one just discussed. Indeed, virtually every significant example of Sack's "Jewish revenge" deserves to be subjected to the severest sort of criticism. I cannot accomplish that in this space. Instead I must make do with an inventory of the major techniques of misrepresentation that Sack uses to create the image of "Jewish revenge."

There is, for a start, Sack's tricky way of identifying every Jew involved in a beating or killing and highlighting his or her behavior, which cumulatively suggests that Jews were more prominent, and more numerously involved, and more central to the terrible deeds, than they were. Then there is the imputation of Jewishness to actors who were not Jews, the example of Lamsdorf being only among the most blatant. Describing the initial arrival of Germans at the camp under Lola's command, a scene in which the guards abuse the Germans, the narrative tells us that there were fifty guards, "some Jews, some not" and mentions only three members of the camp's staff individually (Lola, her adjutant and one guard). These three were all Jews, giving the impression of a heavy Jewish representation; but the endnotes inform us that of the fifty guards, Sack knows the religion of eight, only three of whom were Jews. (This camp, misrepresented in this way, is the major focus of Sack's tale.)

Then there is Sack's skill in making the least relevant into the most relevant. For surely the Jewishness of most of these Jews is not pertinent to the description of their deeds. Some Jews—and many more non-Jews—worked in the Polish internment camps, prisons and security forces. With the exception of a very few individuals, this book presents no evidence whatsoever that these Jews were moved by motives different from those of non-Jews, or that there was anything "Jewish" about their behavior. Neither Sack nor any reputable historian speaks of the brutalities perpetrated on Germans by Catholic Poles or Orthodox Russians incensed by the German killings of priests as "Catholic," "Orthodox" or "Christian" revenge. Jews were Polish democrats, Polish Socialists and Polish Communists, just as non-Jews were. And non-Jews harbored a hatred for Germans as a consequence of German crimes, just as Jews did. The harping on a single aspect of a person's identity as an explanation of his behavior, the reducing of complicated thoughts and

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deeds to a single racial or ethnic or religious essence, is a classic method of bigotry. This method has characterized anti-Semitic literature through the ages.

Excising deeds from their context is another of Sack's favorite procedures. Only toward the end of the narrative does the reader come across information indicating that the horrible deeds imputed to Jews were done under the auspices of the Polish government and its agencies, which set up the camps, ordered the internments and coordinated the brutal policies. The discussion of the book's Jewish actors is not accompanied by an explicit discussion of the deeds of non-Jewish actors. Since direct comparisons between the quantity and the quality of the crimes of Jews and of non-Jews are not offered, the reader gets no inkling that the horrific behavior of the few Jews described was not at all exceptional in the context of what non-Jewish Poles or, for that matter, Czechs and Russians, did to Germans in the aftermath of the war.

And Sack's outright omission or virtual concealment of relevant numbers must also not go unmentioned. You would think that such a book would provide a breakdown of how many Jews were involved, what percentage they were of the population of perpetrators, how significant they were in the crimes against the Germans. Not Sack's book. And I understand why not. To have provided such information would have undermined the entire thrust of the book. In an endnote to the preface, with virtually no evidence, Sack tells us: "Hundreds of Jews joined the organization that ran the prisons and camps for German civilians in Poland and Poland-administered Germany." Later in the notes, based on highly impressionistic estimates with no documentary evidence, we are instructed that the Jewish percentage of certain selected city police forces was high. Hundreds of Jews. Sounds like a lot. Yet we learn still elsewhere in the text that, according to Sack's generous figures, there were 1,255 internment camps for Germans, that the Poles incarcerated 200,000 Germans in them and expelled 10 million. How many non-Jews were involved? The book fails to tell us. The obvious conclusion from these figures spread haphazardly around the book—a conclusion that the book neglects to mention—is that Jews formed a trivial percentage of those carrying out the Polish government's policies against Germans, and that these policies were in no sense Jewish policies, the Jewishness of these Jews being utterly irrelevant to them.

Of all of Sack's methodological failings, his insouciance about hard evidence is perhaps the worst. In the last few years a large historiographical literature has been published, in Polish and in English, on precisely these subjects, but Sack ignores it, relying for his information on accounts, some of them demonstrably false, of first- and second-hand witnesses. (Needless to say, the book comes with no serious investigation of the methodological problems posed by such testimony.) But the facts are that Jews did not run the Polish Office of State Security and Jews did not engineer the deeds that Sack recounts. Sack's assertion to the contrary, and his claim that 75 percent of those in the Office of State Security in Silesia were Jews (which he and Basic Books have repeated in an awkward and defensive "News Release"), are sheer inventions.

For we *know* how many Jews were in the Office of State Security. According to a tabulation of November 21, 1945, by Boleslaw Bierut, then President of Poland, the Office of State Security had 25,600 members, of whom 438 were Jews. 438! Not Sack's 75 percent, but 1.7 percent of its members were Jewish. There were sixty-seven Jews among the 500 people in leading positions. Moreover, the Polish historiographical literature shows that those Jews who were in

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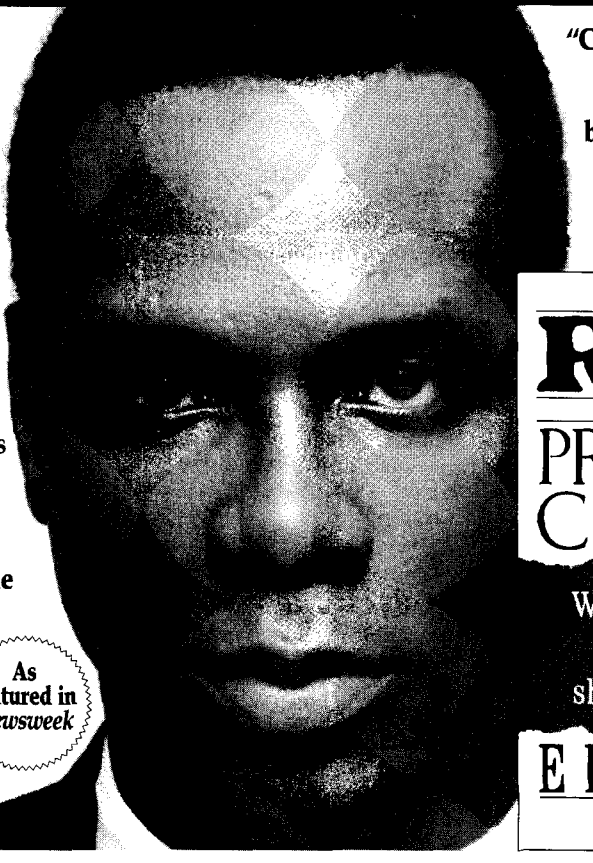

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the Office of State Security did not act as Jews but as Polish Communists (many of them had scarcely any attachment to their Jewishness), and did not act in a manner different from the 25,000 non-Jewish Polish Security officers. Finally, the Office of State Security was not ultimately run by Jewish Poles or non-Jewish Poles. It was run by the Soviets.

These are the most salient facts about the extent of Jewish involvement and responsibility for whatever privations Germans in Poland actually suffered; but none of these facts is to be found anywhere in Sack's book. Instead he proceeds with an indictment by means of false comparisons. Thus the accounts of the deeds attributed to Jews are repeatedly accompanied by irrelevant or unilluminating references to the crimes of Nazis. At one point the book compares *all* of the German deaths in 1,255 Polish internment camps to the number of Jews who died in Buchenwald *alone*, to the number who died in Bergen-Belsen *alone*, and who died in each of a thousand other places, saying that the number of German dead was greater. The comparison is perverse, but it suits Sack's purpose of suggesting that Jews were like Nazis. (He does acknowledge that more Jews died in Auschwitz.)

Sack is not beneath resorting to outright fictionalization. Again and again, he presents highly choreographed scenes of "Jewish" crimes, though the scenes did not happen as they are related. In the endnotes, one finds the following sentences and variants of them: "Some incidents [described in the narrative to have occurred] at the Germans' arrival may have taken place later on," and "some of the conversation at the interrogation [as presented in the narrative] may have happened at later interrogations" and "I have 'reconstructed' the conversation," and so on. How on earth could a serious publisher put out a book on such a sensitive subject, that makes such startling and damaging historical claims, when important sections of it are obviously fictionalized? No wonder Sack's story of Jewish revenge has gone "untold."

Sack's penchant for invention provides one of the "historical" and rhetorical linchpins of the entire book. Stalin is presented by Sack as a friend—indeed, a sort of soulmate—of the Jews. He is described in this book twice as the "Good Fairy" of the Jews, who knew that the loyal Jews would serve him faithfully: "Stalin's fondness for Jews wasn't strange to the Jews, who assumed that he wanted the Germans pursued by the hounds of hell: themselves." Thus Stalin decides as early as 1943 to place the Jews in charge of Poland, so that they can do his bidding. (On page 53, the book makes a passing mention of some Catholic Poles, though Sack says no more about them.) This, we are supposed to believe, is how Jews became so powerful in Poland after the war and, by implication, why we should lay the crimes at their feet. Of course, the book presents not a shred of evidence to support this fantasy. Sack gives not an inkling of Stalin's well-known and rather spectacular anti-Semitism, of his destruction of Jewish life in the Soviet Union, of his persecution of Jews, of his plan to deport the Jews to Siberia. Instead he enlists Stalin in a myth of Jewish conspiracy of the kind that the paranoid Stalin himself liked to imagine.

I must end this abridged inventory of methodological miscreancy here, except to note that Sack also employs a host of minor methods of misrepresenting the truth and misleading the reader. German words shouted from the mouths of brutal Jewish interrogators are presented without translation, as in cheap fiction, as if the content does not matter, because the sound of the language is itself supposed to be sufficiently suggestive of an analogy between Jews and Nazis; and the narrative is frequently ambiguous on the authorship of words and thoughts. Thus, after recounting a brutal interrogation, which concludes with the German being dragged away from Lola by her underlings, and with Lola hearing his screams for mercy, Sack writes, without quotation marks and with no explanation of whose words these are or where these words originate, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew passions? If you wrong the Jews, will they not take revenge?" Is this Sack or Lola? Many readers will not know. In fact, this passage is Sack at his crudest, a purposely imprecise use of Shylock's great speech.

There are many forms of intellectual tawdriness. The ones I have listed so far have to do with historiographical matters, with the scruples of historical research. Not least in a time of "Holocaust revisionism," a violation of these scruples is worth exposing; and John Sack's and Basic Books's violation of these scruples is a scandal. (As is Sack's grotesque insistence on presenting the book as an expression of his own Jewishness, even invoking the Torah's injunction to "bear honest witness.") But the scandal is greater still. For Sack is as sloppy morally as he is methodologically. The moral categories upon which he bases his analysis are seriously flawed, and the most flawed one of them all is the central concept of his book, I mean the concept of "Jewish revenge."

Imagine that 6 million Americans—or, speaking proportionately, tens of millions of Americans today—were systematically slaughtered. Imagine that a few hundred Americans lived in another country under a foreign government, a government to which they gave their allegiance, and that these few hundred were members of that government's institutions. Imagine that those institutions employed tens of thousands of people who killed thousands of people from the country that had initially slaughtered the millions of Americans, and also killed many people of the country now exacting retribution. Imagine that the remaining scores of millions of Americans took absolutely no part in the deeds, and did not even know about them. Would we call this "American revenge"? Would a reputable publisher publish the "untold story" of "American revenge"?

But this is what has been done with Jews. Not surprisingly, there is a disclaimer deep in Sack's endnotes, in what appears to be a random location, a place to which no reader would think of turning for information of such importance, and it reads: "They hadn't mobilized all the Jews and the Jewish state: there *was* no Jewish state [emphasis in original]." In the same paragraph Sack also acknowledges that there are vast differences between what these Jews did to Germans and what the Germans did to Jews, since the Jews did not plan to exterminate the entire German people "and, in the end, didn't kill even 2 percent of what the Germans did." So, even if Sack here wrongly attributes *all* of the German deaths to the Jews, he does seem to know that the Holocaust was incommensurate with the subsequent atrocities. Why, then, does he not state all of these points clearly and prominently in the body of his text, to prevent the grievous misunderstandings? But then he might have robbed himself of a sensation.

And even in this disclaimer, Sack makes matters worse. He suggests, the numbers of dead aside, that the Jews were in some ways *worse* than the Germans, because they acted willfully, while most Germans in his view did not act willfully, since they were obeying orders from the Nazi leadership. This misunderstands a great deal. For the routine brutality of so many German killers, and the zeal with which they killed, can be described only as willful. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the Jews whom Sack is indicting were any less working under orders. Sack's whitewashing of the responsibility of the German perpetrators is extraordinary. And

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the Jews, Sack astonishingly continues, were worse also because they, unlike the Germans, knew that what they were doing was wrong.

In another note Sack gives himself away still more unequivocally. After writing that German prisoners of war were beaten in American camps, he discusses (not surprisingly) only a single instance, namely, that of an American Army interrogator who was Jewish (and whom he refers to, characteristically, as "the Jew") kicking an S.S. general. Discussing what might be motivating the interrogator to kick the S.S man (he delivered only *one* kick, which Sack obscures), Sack writes, with absolutely no evidence: "More likely, the Jew was doing some heavy-handed status-seeking, as though he were saying to [George] Orwell [who was present, and wrote about the incident in the *Tribune* in November 1945], the S.S general and particularly himself, 'I'm doing what the S.S. did, so I'm as good as the S.S.'" With this, Sack unwittingly reveals one of his primary methods, namely the projection of his own fanciful thinking into the mind of "the Jew." Jews, Sack imagines, want to emulate the S.S.!

Sack does acknowledge that the harsh treatment of these Germans by these Jews was not without "provocation." Still, he cannot be bothered to explore seriously the sources and the meanings of revenge, or the differences between the behavior of a few Jews "taking revenge" (however criminally) and the systematic, willful, unprovoked and unimaginably cruel slaughter of European Jewry by tens of thousands of Germans. The reality of Jewish "revenge" against Germans after the war is never actually discussed in this book. For the reality is that there was virtually none. It is astounding how little the survivors of the Holocaust, and those who identified with them, sought to take vengeance upon Germans. Indeed, the absence of the avenging impulse was almost abnormal.

Jews in Western occupation forces, soldiers and administrators alike, inflicted no punishment upon Germans. The many survivors of the Holocaust who ended up in Germany after the war did not exact retribution on their former tormentors. And not least for this reason, thousands of German mass murderers, who manned the mobile killing squads and the concentration camps, have lived during the postwar period unmolested in Germany and elsewhere. Jews have not tried to kill them. The only significant "revenge" (and one could hardly call it that) was symbolic. Wagner was banned from Israeli national radio; many individual Jews (though not the state of Israel) decided not to buy German goods or to travel to Germany; and Jews have accepted reparations from the government of the Federal Republic and called for the trials of German mass murderers.

The full story of the Jewish response to Germans after the war, in sum, would have shown that the deeds described in Sack's book (those deeds, that is, that were actually committed by Jews) are only a small footnote to the story. When one strips away the book's sixty pages that precede the period of "revenge" and the fifteen self-congratulatory pages that tell us of its author's tireless detective work, one is left with a thin eighty pages of narrative of the sort that I have exposed here. The book is only a congeries of anecdotes—many of them dubious and farfetched, and also uncheckable, since they are based almost completely on personal interviews—about the deeds of merely a handful of people. (It is important to note that neither Lola, the book's main protagonist, nor her guards, however much they beat prisoners, ever killed. The deaths in Lola's camp, like most of the German deaths, and the deaths of Germans that occurred in American internment camps after the war, were due to outbreaks of typhus and other diseases.)

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Sack's analogy between Jews and Nazis will be to anti-Semites, neo-Nazis and the deniers of the Holocaust, here and in Germany. What a relief from guilt, what an opportunity for spurious vindication and wild hatred, his book will give them. I have no personal knowledge of John Sack. I know nothing of his motives. I am not saying that he is an anti-Semite. For a student of anti-Semitism, however, the methods of John Sack's book ring a bell. Or more precisely, an alarm.

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN, assistant professor of government and social studies at Harvard University, is completing a book on the perpetrators of the Holocaust.

Spellbound

BY DAVID THOMSON

Hollywood On the Couch: A Candid Look at the Overheated Love Affair Between Psychiatrists and Moviemakers by Stephen Farber and Marc Green

(Morrow, 352 pp., $23)

Bombshell: The Life and Death of Jean Harlow by David Stenn

(Doubleday, 370 pp., $22.50)

Jean Harlow looked so desirable it was comic. But as she died, she stank from the accumulation of waste in that body. She was 26, dead and immortal. Who ever wanted to be cured? So many Hollywood patients sought uncritical company, soothing assent, the loyalty of attention. Narcissism was their illness, but it was a narcissism horribly provoked by the humiliations and the affronts of the film business. The "talent" was often inseparable from the "neurosis."

If Marilyn Monroe had ever been made well, independent and competent, she would have taken the first bus out of town; her looks might have gone in a morning; she might have vanished, even. But she remained tied to forces she loved and loathed—her doctors, her fans, the studio, the movies—in a spiral of masochistic provocation. It could not last, but who could stop it? A slimmed-down Alfred Hitchcock might have turned into the womanizer of his own dreams, and even been happy. But he stayed vast, tortured, a poet of the voyeurism that looks and longs but cannot have, and slowly acquires menace. Who ever thought, in sum, that the movies were healthy? Their insidious intimation of perfection in an imperfect world ensures less the pursuit of happiness than the treadmill of frustration.

It is part of the deadpan charm of *Hollywood On the Couch* that the book comes without razor blades, Prozac or a crystal. There is not even a laugh track. Indeed, there is so little affect on the part of the book's authors that you wonder if they have read their own stuff. They have purged themselves of outrage or merriment, trusting us to share in the fun of the lofty making idiots of themselves. The faith is justified, and the book is entertaining. The 90210 couch is a great site for comedies of conflicting interests. Except that fun seems small-minded compared with the passionate interaction of movies and psychology. We do like to watch minds working.

Professional shrinking stands in disrepute now. There are scandals every year, and ample reason to believe that analysis is a way for the privileged to escape responsibility for what they do. Freud is no longer simply a genius, but an awkward mix of healer, writer, careerist and old fogy. As such, he helps to explain the practitioners we are likely to meet. We collect stories of professional malpractice, of doctors more disturbed than patients, of iniquity and farce done in the name of psychiatry; and we carefully calibrate the gap between Woody Allen the analysand of decades and the slave of his melancholy urges. And many people who cannot summon the money, the time or the humorless self-concern for analysis have found new life in drugs.

So it is easy to echo Nabokov's scorn for "the Viennese quack." Yet is not *Lolita* compelling because of its pursuit of a taboo? And don't we know now that "the first little throb" of *Lolita* crept up on Nabokov in 1939 with the novella *The Enchanter*? Does the fact that Woody Allen made a fool of himself, and victims of a few people, disqualify the marvels of *Radio Days* and *The Purple Rose of Cairo*? Don't we thrive, rather, on such contradictions? We read stories, we watch movies, to practice our skills in reading the mind. Maybe we make love so that we can talk afterward in the dark.

Sooner or later in the picture business, conflict of interest prevails. (Every screenwriter knows that if there is no conflict, there is no interest.) As Farber and Green recount the history of psychiatry in Beverly Hills, that conflict is as natural as stargazing. The beautiful and the famous are easily uneasy. Which is proper, since many of them know how squalid or untidy their lives are, and they marvel at the suddenness that has lifted them out of the dark and into the shining light of story. In the beauty business, you're always asking, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the loveliest at CAA?" The camera loves you, but the camera is a slut. Hardening yourself to its lack of sympathy, you may have to out-slut all others.

Historically, Hollywood provides many other reasons for anxiety and ruffled splendor: your good friends and associates are scumbags; you might be Jewish; you might have a past to hide—and most people have something to hide when caught in the glare of being *Pretty Woman* or running for president (the roles are converging); you may be so horny that you can't keep your hands off the other beauties whom you are required to kiss for the camera; you know that you are making garbage that is being devoured by millions; you know that you are a genius, but your work perishes at the box office; you are not sure whether to go liposuction, Pritikin or anorexia; you are deeply wounded by the climate of cold betrayal all around you; and you want to *get* those treacherous swine, I mean, do *damage* (and if there is anything that making movies teaches, it's how to do damage).

Then there are the fires, the earthquakes, Mussolini in Abyssinia and famine in Ethiopia, blacks on the street and Reds at the Guild. Nobody's perfect, but you're in dream manufacture. And you *know* that you're troubled, because if you're up on Summit Drive now, a leader in the business, a household name, with Life Achievement Awards, a paragraph of thanks in the new Marianne Williamson book, a de Kooning and a Hopper and Bill's deep personal respect, don't you remember every detail of humiliation from those years when you

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were shat upon? Can we talk?

Farber and Green concentrate on the windy talk of self-promotion. They know, and say often, that there are fine doctors doing good work, austere and discreet. We hear how directors like Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet and Joseph L. Mankiewicz benefited from therapy—or learned to exploit it. (Mankiewicz, it is said, picked up seduction techniques on the couch.) But it is a test of good doctors that they don't talk to people writing books. It is also the dilemma of writers on these subjects that they must deplore gabby docs, while depending on their anecdotes. Moreover, doctors who do talk usually long to be partners in their patients' celebrity and work. After all, if you dream of what Marilyn is feeling, your best shot is to be her analyst or her acting coach, if you can tell the one job from the other.

There was a pioneering meeting in couch history, and Farber and Green make a lot of it. As the full weight of success from *Gone With the Wind* fell on its producer, David O. Selznick, he had a kind of breakdown. Long-sought glory often provokes that reaction in Hollywood; the posture for climbing is not made for relaxation. Selznick had plenty of reasons for confusion, many in the general diagnosis offered above. He was also a heavy gambler with a sweet tooth for Benzedrine.

And so he was in a funk, and his wife Irene, the daughter of Louis B. Mayer, found someone to treat him: May Romm, a small, animated woman, once of Vitebsk. They got along like the house-on-fire in *Rebecca*. Selznick loved talking about himself (Irene had grown bored with that subject, and few had Selznick's stamina for the self), and he fell in love with the processes of analysis, motivation, action and reaction. It was just like a script conference! (Farber and Green rather neglect the intuition of filmmakers that the method of psychiatry resembles their own job.) Soon Selznick was bouncy again, the energy for all his faults of behavior renewed. But May Romm was his friend, and he liked her company. So he hired her to advise on projects, and on Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, arguably the most ludicrous Hollywood treatment of psychiatry. Dr. Romm read the scripts, made forlorn suggestions, got screen credit and $1,500, as well as the puzzle of preserving integrity and professional reputation. She was suckered by an expert at selling himself. Still, she was happy. Her life, too, was not wine and roses. She adored show people and felt important in their ceaseless crises. The Selznicks also recommended her to friends. She was as hot as the tennis coach who invented the two-handed backhand.

If Romm's was the first test case, it was less devious and distasteful than much that followed. Farber and Green's book goes on to report the ministry of Dr. Ralph Greenson, who believed that he enjoyed a family life so wholesome that it would surely benefit Marilyn Monroe to be chez Greenson as much as possible. Dr. Herbert Kupper became such a seer for Judy Garland that he advised MGM to replace her husband, Vincente Minnelli, on *Easter Parade*. "Judy's psychiatrist thinks it would be better all around if you don't direct the picture," Metro producer Arthur Freed told Minnelli. "That you symbolize all her troubles with the studio."

When the Columbia executive David Begelman forged the actor Cliff Robertson's signature endorsing checks, the studio tried to avert prosecution and stockholder trauma by having Begelman seek treatment with Dr. Judd Marmor. As a result, Begelman—hitherto a man of immense panache and Gabled confidence—appeared before the Columbia board not just contrite, but glibly Marmorized. After a whole six weeks of ther-

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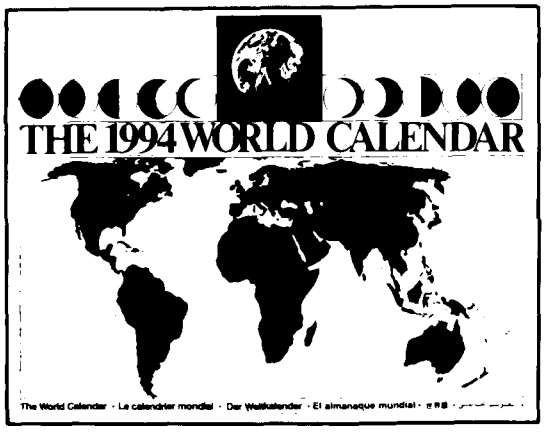

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apy, he said, he had

> learned a great deal about the roots of my misdeeds. The roots go deep, all the way back to my childhood and my relations with parents and my siblings. In sum, the problem amounts to an unnaturally low self-esteem, a feeling of unworthiness and an inability to accommodate success.

A few days later Dr. Marmor addressed the board. He said Begelman's problem was "a neurotic disorder rather than a flaw of character." For a moment, Columbia was ready to move on: they enjoyed good acting and sudden confessions, and the habit of two-hour movies can make a six-week therapy seem lifelong. Only public outcry reminded them of reality, and got Begelman fired.

The anecdotes mount. When the actor Robert Walker died, it was because his special mix of disturbances and drugs had been topped off by an injection of sodium amytal by Dr. Frederick Hacker, done without blood tests; some said the injection amounted to murder, yet Hacker was the psychiatrist hired by Walker's ex-wife, Jennifer Jones, and her new husband, the aforesaid and clinically hip David O. Selznick, to give therapy to the 11-year-old Robert Walker Jr.

Dr. David Rubinfine, with wife and three daughters, fell in love with a patient, the comedienne Elaine May. Rubinfine left his family and, a few months later, his wife killed herself. May, who now has a reputation as a script doctor, was said to have uttered the deadly line, "What a hostile thing to do." Less than six weeks after Rosa Rubinfine's death, her husband and Elaine May were married.

The legendary Dr. Milton Wexler had tried to talk Mrs. Rubinfine out of suicide, but to no avail. He is the lord of soft-talk in the rackety principality reported by Farber and Green. He must have been a brilliant adviser (or director), since so many in the business felt that he guided them to better performance. It was Wexler who encouraged Jennifer Jones to marry Norton Simon. (Jones is a recurring figure in this book, the grand old lady of therapy, a veteran of suicide attempts, who has buried three husbands and a daughter.) Then Wexler set up a charity, the Hereditary Disease Foundation, and got the Simons and most of his other starry clients to contribute. He was not the only analyst who spent so much time with movie people that he began to think scripts. But he went further than others: he got two of his patients, Blake Edwards and Julie Andrews, to turn two of them into pictures, *The Man Who Loved Women* and *That's Life!*, which were as bad as anything done in their time.

Many of these stories are upsetting; all have streaks of black comedy. Still, they are not much more than gossip. *Hollywood On the Couch* cannot really claim candor, and the "overheated" in the subtitle sounds like the publisher trying to persuade its customers that they are being thrilled and shocked. I take my lead from the authors, who don't turn a cool hair: it really is hard to be indignant over so much self-deception. There are a few victims, to be sure; but it's the doctors who come off worst. They are caught in their own compromise, starfuckers who love the syrupy self-righteousness of their own lines. One of the most intriguing is the radio and T.V. doctor David Viscott, who administers a strange, medicinal, hypnotic diagnosis over the air.

Invariably these doctors become the prisoners of their famous patients. Farber and Green are very good on how Ralph Greenson became the slave of Monroe's erratic whims, no matter that he may have wanted to make her dependent on him. Actors are meant to be seductive; even sick actors exert great power. They may make their doctors into retainers, expected to answer every 2 a.m. call and to attend every dreadful party. For, as May Romm once guessed, there are patients who go on forever in stable disturbance, so long as they are never threatened with cure.

Farber and Green also deliver an astute assessment of the intricate alliance between psychiatry and the Actors' Studio, and the way in which both "promoted self-indulgent soul-searching." Thus Lee Strasberg, the head of the Studio, is presented as possibly the most influential, and certainly the least generous, of the Hollywood analysts, pushing actors into the depths of sense memory and producing an entire generation of desperately yearning and thoroughly incoherent performances. His brand of psychological realism begins to loom large as one of American film's most crushing, self-imposed burdens, not to say the most tortured confusion of art and therapy.

But most larger cultural references are cut off. Thus Farber and Green do not really examine the timing of the psychiatry vogue in Hollywood. May Romm was a star of the '40s, and it was around 1944 to 1950 that Hollywood began to make a few pictures with psychiatrists as characters—not just *Spellbound*, but *Lady in the Dark*, *The Dark Mirror* and *The Snake Pit*, all of which are mentioned, if briefly. Not one of those films is very good, or as interesting on neurotic personality as other films from the same period: *Laura*, *Gaslight*, *Double Indemnity*, *Curse of the Cat People*, *Experiment Perilous*, *The Woman in the Window*, *Leave Her to Heaven*, *Detour*, *Love Letters*, *Notorious*, *Gilda*, *Crossfire*, *The Fountainhead*, *Criss Cross*, etc., etc. For those were the years of film noir, the genre in which Hollywood took on the topics of disturbed personality, self-destructive behavior, irrational action and all kinds of delusion. Why did that genre come into being around the end of the war? Around the time, that is, that psychotherapy was first attaining its prestige in American culture?

Hollywood On the Couch ignores such an issue, and I can only offer a few educated guesses. All through the 1930s, Hollywood had found ingenious, but fantastic, ways to rise above the real Depression, and to urge on us all the dream of magnificent transformation. The charge of Hollywood was: pursue happiness, because it *is* there. The war was a terrible reward for those dreams, and many in Hollywood were aghast at the spuriousness of the comfort that had been offered.

Moreover, the many Jews who worked in Hollywood (and who often hoped that their Jewishness would go unnoticed)

Ice Time

Now winter bares its teeth.
Fang upon dripping fang
festoons each overhang.
As we duck underneath

on our way out or in
we ask, Will this portcullis
flash down to annul us?
It is no friendly grin

the roofs and gutters show.
You say one willing vandal
swinging a shovel handle
would end the threat. I know,

and yet I hesitate.
Something in this grimace
that wracks the season's face
disposes me to wait

at least a while, to see
how much the sun can do
by sending daylight through
the jaws of jeopardy.

If, dazzled then, I leave
the long points gleaming there,
call it a child's dare
flung at the bristling eave

just for the hell of it.
We have crossed thresholds more
beset by risks before
and lived to tell of it.

ROBERT B. SHAW

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were stricken by the discovery of what had happened to Jews in Europe. The force of evil was felt even in Tinseltown, and entered the scenario-making of the national imagination. Newsreel footage from concentration camps made it so much harder to encourage the chase after happiness. For something like seven years, American movies disdained happy endings, and portrayed human terrors that make *Jurassic Park* seem like cake. Of course, it did not last: noir had the smack of being un-American, and by 1950 that had become a dire offense. In the next decade television re-educated Americans about just how remorselessly cheerful American movies should be.

In other words, there was a time when there were fine films that took for granted a sense of anxiety, and that had wondrous ways of translating anxiety into imagery and story. Narratives were never more complex or unreliable; images were never as dark or morbid. I wish that Farber and Green had paid more attention to this background, as well as to the rich affinities between psychiatry and storytelling. They rehearse the familiar notions that actors are especially insecure, but they do not give them equal credit for being willful pioneers in role-playing and in the addiction to behavioral analysis. A more searching investigation of just a few films could have made the book more challenging and useful. It would also remind us why we like stories and films, and what they do to make us all amateur psychiatrists.

How does *Bombshell* fit into all this? Not just as a lucid and even gentle account of a wretched life that looked golden to strangers. Jean Harlow's history also includes one of Hollywood's great mysteries, an incident that has provoked psychological detectives for more than sixty years. On July 2, 1932, Harlow married Paul Bern, an executive at MGM. She was 21 and the most carnal light on screen. He was 43, German, Jewish and a friend to the Bernays family, who were related to the Freuds. Bern was very smart, and always curious about people. He had thoughts of studying psychiatry as a youth. But the family had come to America, and instead he went into the picture business.

He was the studio couch-man at MGM, nearly two decades before the fashion set in. He developed Eugene O'Neill's psychoanalytic play *Strange Interlude* as a film for Norma Shearer. He was interested in stories about sex, neurosis, perversion. He was also a brilliant confidant to the studio's great, so quick and insightful that he seemed magical. There were conflicting stories that he was homosexual, bisexual, a ladies' man and not very sexual at all. (Being that clever in Hollywood inspires rumors.) But Bern loved taking confession from beautiful women; he was a model for doctors and hairdressers to come. Harlow was one of those who treasured his wisdom, and so they married. It was as striking and as doomed a match as that of Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller years later.

Then, on the morning of Labor Day, Bern was found, shot and killed in his and her house on Easton Drive. There was a note left behind, cryptic and odd: it could have been a note from a Sherlock Holmes story. Its mystery has lasted. There have been disputes ever since about what happened. Films and books have treated the incident, most recently *Deadly Illusions* by Samuel Marx and Joyce Vanderveen. There was a common law wife from Bern's past who may have been in Los Angeles at the time. She was found dead a couple of days later near Sacramento. Had Bern been impotent and ashamed? Had Harlow shot him? Where was she at the time of the shooting?

No need to answer those questions here. But David Stenn's book, I think, has the answers, owing to exemplary research and a thorough knowledge of Hollywood. Stenn has tracked down survivors, the children of those who were there and hitherto unseen papers. Piece by piece he has made the story not just of Bern's death, but of Harlow's life. Along the way, he reveals more about why someone like Harlow needed someone like Bern than *Hollywood On the Couch* ever could. The marriage to Bern had been absurd: it acted out fantasies that needed to stay in the dark. And the marriage reminded Bern of how much he had to hide. Stenn's re-creation rises to a moment when Harlow stormed out of the house on the line, "Well, when you find out who you're married to, let me know." That's such a great "Harlow" line, a moment at which a human disaster grabbed hold of the force she had on screen.

So I recommend *Bombshell* as the answer to an old puzzle, and for its scrupulous portrait of a community in which a lot of shit has to be digested. So much psychiatry in Hollywood is sugar on the shit. Farber and Green conclude their book with a survey of more recent self-help counselors, notably Mildred Newman and Bernard Berkowitz, who wrote *How to Be Your Own Best Friend*. On the movie set of *Play It As It Lays*, the actor Anthony Perkins observed a copy of that book being passed around and read as gospel: the book! Time and again, these quick uplifters have their rage, and their briefly tranquil zealots. If only Hollywood people would trust the chilling and laconic accuracy of *Play It As It Lays*. The book, not the movie.

DAVID THOMSON is the author of *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick* (Knopf).

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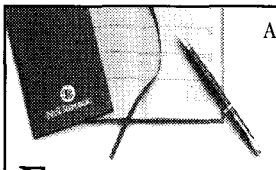

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Habits of the Heart

BY FRANCINE PROSE

On Love
by Alain de Botton

(Atlantic Monthly Press, 213 pp., $17)

In the preface to his treatise *On Love*, Stendhal breezily takes off running past those indolent earlier writers who dropped out of the game after cataloging only "400 or 500 of the successive emotions, so difficult to recognize, which go to make up this passion." Stendhal way overshot the 500 mark in his own effort to categorize and to analyze, to qualify and to refine, to collect every anecdote and trenchant word ever uttered about *l'amour*.

Now, in a smart and ironic first novel, also entitled *On Love*, Alain de Botton picks up the torch, so to speak, more or less where Stendhal left off. De Botton's *On Love* reads as if Stendhal had lived into the '90s, survived modern critical theory (as he clearly has), thought it was funny (as he likely would have), but retained a novelist's sympathy for the impulse—which he shared—to deconstruct and to dissect in search of some higher understanding.

Divided into titled chapters ("Romantic Fatalism," "The Subtext of Seduction," "False Notes," "Romantic Terrorism" and so on) and brief, numbered sections separated by space breaks, de Botton's novel is a mock and serious philosophical inquiry into the grand passion that Stendhal compared to the Milky Way, "a bright mass made up of thousands of little stars, each of which is often itself a nebula." What launches the novel's obsessive, self-conscious and rather sweetly cerebral narrator on his own astral explorations is an intense and ill-starred love affair with a woman named Chloe.

He and Chloe meet on a shuttle from Paris to London and have a flirty conversation over the airplane safety diagram card. They dine in restaurants with names like Les Liaisons Dangereuses and Lao Tzu, seduce each other, make love, fall in love, partly combine their busy London lives (he is an architect, she a graphic designer) into a sort of third life with a history of its own and recurrent leitmotifs based on shared experience (a corpse they discover in the street, a stranger who passes Chloe a mash note in a bagel shop). They go on lovers' holidays that are at first ecstatic, then markedly less idyllic as their passion falters, until their romance crashes and burns on a flight from Paris, slyly written as the evil twin of the flight on which they met.

One of the novel's nervy jokes is how perfectly ordinary, how unexceptional, all this is. (The course of this affair would doggedly follow the parabola we can imagine the narrator drawing along with the visual aids—diagrams and charts—that he scatters throughout the text.) De Botton is well aware of this. And the narrator knows it, too. But that doesn't keep him from making his textbook-case romance the center of his life, and the improbable springboard for his metaphysical triple flips. So each mini-step forward or setback in his love moves him to microscopic analysis or flights of heroic abstraction.

At moments he succumbs with almost giddy abandon to passages of loony post-structuralist rhetoric, sheer bombast and quasi-academic absurdity. Fearing that Chloe has begun to fake orgasm, he plots a logarithmic measure of the sincerity of her response:

> It was at first hard for me to imagine an untruth lasting 3.2 seconds fitted into a sequence of eight 0.8-second contractions, the first and last two (3.2s) of which were genuine. It was easier to imagine a complete truth, or a complete lie, but the idea of a truth-lie-truth pattern seemed perverse and unnecessary.

Alternately, he is capable of keen observation, flashes of genuine lyricism, acuity and depth:

> However happy we may be with our partner, our love for them necessarily prevents us ... from starting other romantic liaisons. But why should this constrain us if we truly loved them? Why should we feel this as a loss unless our love for them has already begun to wane? The answer perhaps lies in the uncomfortable thought that in resolving our need to love, we may not always succeed in resolving our need to long.

The great minds of the past—Saint Theresa of Avila, Darwin, Freud, the Oracle at Delphi—are quoted and consulted, as if for second opinions on the state of his love for Chloe.

What lends *On Love* its sprightliness is the satisfying way in which these philosophical test-balloons are repeatedly sent up and almost immediately punctured by little pellets of reality: here, the phenomenally banal events that mark this love affair's milestones. Deflated, theory collapses into fiction, into elegantly taut and deftly paced comic scenes. So, intent on seduction, the narrator resolves to obliterate his personality and remake himself in the image of someone Chloe might love. "My idea of what she wanted from a lover could have been compared to a tight-fitting suit and my true self to a fat man, so that the evening was a process resembling a fat man's trying to fit into a suit that is too small for him."

The problem is, he doesn't know enough about Chloe to know what she might want, until at last Chloe reveals a fondness for chocolate cake and he orders the sweet dessert—to which he is allergic. A meditation on the reality of Chloe's apparent perfection ends abruptly when she refers to a Bach cantata as "impossible yodeling." A dream of perfect union with one's Platonic "other half" ends when Chloe brings home a new pair of truly hideous shoes, "a platformed sole rising sharply up to a heel with the breadth of a flat shoe but as tall as a stiletto," and a "faintly rococo collar, decorated with a bow and stars and framed by a piece of chunky ribbon." In the midst of a convoluted meditation on the differences between political terrorism—Japanese Red Army members mowing down airplane passengers—and romantic terrorism—"a gamut of tricks (sulking, jealousy, guilt) that attempts to force the partner to return love, by blowing up (in fits of tears, rage or otherwise) in front of the loved one"—these lovers have a hilarious, grimly quotidian squabble in which each accuses the other of having locked their hotel key in the room.

It is a tricky novel, but to de Botton's credit the tricks are never cloying, and they are almost always amusing, not least because we sense the writer's own exhilaration in being able to make them work. This, of course, is quite different from watching a writer show off. Unusual things *do* work in this book; somehow de Botton is able to draw Chloe's character sharply even through the myopic lens of her self-obsessed lover, to make us sympathize with him and with her, and at the same time understand why she can't stand him, forever. (What woman would want to stay with a man who could so drastically doubt his love simply because

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he thinks that she has bought an awful pair of new shoes?)

It is a tricky thing to construct a novel on the framework of a plot that is, by design, ordinary and predictable. But it is precisely because we know it all so well—that first blush of attraction, that last quarrel about the keys—that the novel is so credible and so funny. And de Botton plays a daring game with how seriously we are meant to take this: we are mostly willing to agree that this romance is a matter of life and death, even though the narrator never loses his ironic distance or his self-conscious rationality, not even in the midst of sex or a half-serious suicide attempt. We come to feel, as he does, that his love is a matter of consequence, even though we are told from the start, "Until one is actually dead (and then it must be considered impossible) it is difficult to consider anyone as the love of one's life."

The book's success has much to do with its beautifully modeled sentences, its wry humor, its unwavering deadpan respect for its reader's intelligence. A wonderful chapter, titled "Marxism," takes its text from "the old joke made by the Marx who laughed about not deigning to belong to a club that would accept someone like him" and, blithely assuming we will understand that this Marx is Groucho, not Karl, goes on to discuss *this* Marxism, a theory that addresses the problem of continuing to love someone even though that person loves us. Only very rarely does de Botton's nerve slip, as it does near the end, when he anxiously makes certain that we know precisely how far all this hard mental labor has finally gotten his narrator:

> Love taught the analytic mind a certain humility, the lesson that no matter how hard it struggled to reach immobile certainties (numbering its conclusions and embedding them in neat series) analysis could never be anything but flawed—and therefore never stray far from the ironic.

One can't blame de Botton for stating the obvious, and not just because he's a first novelist. Some might suggest that this is not the ideal moment in literary history in which to stake everything on the reading public's intelligence, on its awareness of subtlety, even on its ability to read. One hopes that *On Love* will find its readers, the ones who get the joke, who understand that fiction can be funny *and* serious, who don't mistrust irony as an elitist trick; who can, without prompting, distinguish Groucho from Karl.

FRANCINE PROSE is the author most recently of *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

Strange Births

BY HARRIET RITVO

Monstrous Imagination by Marie-Hélène Huet

(Harvard University Press, 344 pp., $49.95, $19.95 paper)

Gestation and parturition are very ordinary processes, endlessly repeated parts of the mammalian life cycle, and yet people have never been inclined to take them for granted. Not only are they essential for the continuation of the species, or the tribe, or the family, but their outcome is difficult to predict. Mother and baby may not survive; and living or stillborn, the offspring may not conform to the anticipated physical pattern, displaying instead some unusual configuration of limbs and other features. Such anomalies have traditionally been called "monstrosities," and have long appeared even more interesting than ordinary infants, commanding attention far beyond the intimate family circle. Nowadays this interest is expressed most frequently by the weekly newspapers sold at supermarket checkout counters. Until well into the last century, however, the audience for anomalous births included refined curiosity-seekers and earnest scientists, as well as those committed to credulity.

To gratify this wide audience, monstrosities were routinely displayed not only in sideshows and in the back rooms of taverns, but also in the laboratories and the exhibition cases of the learned. The early papers of Britain's distinguished Royal Society suggest that a parade of anomalies entertained the erudite scientific gentlemen—several giant children (one of which was described along with a similarly oversized herring), a hermaphrodite, children born without brains or with deformed heads, a child with extraordinarily long fingers and toes, and children with horns. Most striking was an account of a living child with two heads, one at each end of its body, four fairly ordinary arms and three legs sticking out around its midsection. The anatomical collections that formed the basis of Victorian surgical education were richly provided with children, calves, piglets, chickens, puppies, kittens and lambs born with either too few or too many major body parts, preserved for posterity in rows of large glass jars. Charles Darwin thought carefully about birth anomalies when he was developing his theory of evolution by natural selection. They also figured importantly in the emerging discipline of embryology and in teratology, literally the study of monsters or prodigies, a discipline that emerged briefly in the nineteenth century only to subside again.

That scientists shared this fascination with gullible freak show patrons for so long may seem remarkable in the light late twentieth-century assumptions about the relation of science to religion and other alternative ways of interpreting the natural world. From a longer chronological perspective, such as that offered by Marie-Hélène Huet in her new book, the conjunction of lay and learned seems less paradoxical. The first half of the book comprehensively recounts the development of scientific (or philosophical) ideas about the generation of monstrosities through the eighteenth century. She begins her discussion in the sixteenth century, more than a century before the Royal Society was established, at a time when the line between science and other kinds of speculation was rather difficult to determine, and when the authority of the remote past, distilled in names such as Aristotle or Pliny, was at least as compelling as that of modern experts. (Even the use of the word "science" with reference to this period is anachronistic, and therefore somewhat misleading, since it inevitably carries with it distinctions and standards that belong to a later time.) Early modern accounts of monstrosities often borrowed heavily from the bestiaries and books of marvels of the ancient and medieval periods, thus featuring people with dogs' heads or goats' legs, alongside people with extra legs or hirsute bodies.

Although the unusual physical endowments of such individuals may have guaranteed them an immediate audience of the shocked or the titillated, the persistence and the breadth of their appeal rested on deeper foundations. By their very existence, monstrous births posed a question of deep concern to the learned and the unlettered alike. Why did they happen? Especially in a religious age, an

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What are the facts?

A city of many nationalities. Before the end of the 1967 Six-Day War, during which the Israeli Defense Forces reconquered Jerusalem from the Jordanians, claims to Jerusalem being a Moslem holy city were rarely, if ever asserted. Jerusalem had always been a city in which many religions and nationalities lived side by side. It was only after the old city was back in Jewish hands that the Moslem Arabs declared their willingness to wage "jihad" (holy war) to bring the city back into Arab possession.

The notion to call Jerusalem an Islamic holy city has only come about in modern times, especially after the Arabs lost the city in the Six-Day War. It now has gained currency by dint of constant repetition. The basis for the claim is that Jerusalem does indeed contain an Islamic holy site, namely the Temple Mount (sacred to both Moslems and Jews) with its two mosques. It is the place from which Mohammed is believed to have ascended to heaven. Mohammed never set foot in Jerusalem. But aware that it was the holy city of Christians and Jews, and wishing to convert them to his new religion, he commanded his followers to build a mosque in Jerusalem. But never in Moslem history did this mosque compare in significance to the Moslem holy cities of Mecca and Medina—cities that no " infidel" may visit.

A tenuous Moslem claim. It's on the basis of this religious tradition that the Moslems designated the entire Jewish Temple Mount to be their holy site. The Israeli Government, in its constant spirit of accommodation to Moslem sensibilities, has largely acceded to this tradition and has put the area in and around the two mosques entirely under Moslem control. But how would Christians feel if, instead of from the Temple Mount, Moslem tradition had Mohammed ascend from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and if the Moslem Arabs were to claim that site as their property? The Christian world, often ready to consent to Moslem claims against Jews and Israelis, would be greatly astonished and would certainly resist such claim. But Moslem Arab assertiveness doesn't end there. On the tenuous claim to the Temple Mount, they have construed a claim to the entire city of Jerusalem (or at the very least to its eastern part), which they have declared to be their "third holiest city". And it would be an insult to all Moslems and all Arabs to leave the city in the hands of the "infidel Jews".

> "Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish life, of Jewish yearning, and of Jewish thinking for over 3000 years."

Jerusalem: never an Arab capital. But the city of Jerusalem—in contrast to Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus—has never played any major role in the political and religious lives of the Moslem Arabs. It was never a political center, never a national or even a provincial or sub-provincial capital of any country since biblical times. It was the site of one Moslem holy place, but otherwise a backwater to the Arabs. The passion for Jerusalem was not discovered by the Moslem Arabs until most recent history.

Jews are not the usurpers in Jerusalem. They have been living there since the Biblical era and have been the majority population since the 19th century. Jews have holy sites in most cities of the world. But do they claim sovereignty over those cities because of it? Of course not! It would be preposterous. And the Moslem Arab claim to Jerusalem, based on the mosques on the Temple Mount, is just as untenable. Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish life, of Jewish yearning, and of Jewish thinking for over 3000 years. That is the reason that the State of Israel has rededicated the Jewish holy city to be its indivisible capital.

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age that considered nature to be the visible face of god, such disruptions of the standard and desirable course of events had to have significance. Among the philosophically inclined, the quest for understanding could lead to theories about the boundaries of nature, and also about the laws that controlled nature. Less rarefied thinkers, who limited their focus to the fact that something had gone seriously wrong with an important natural process, simply looked for someone to blame. Wherever such inquiries began—and no matter who was making them—they eventually arrived at the prescription cherished by investigators of a much later epoch: *cherchez la femme.*

Where childbearing is concerned, the woman is generally not hard to find. Indeed, as Huet emphasizes in the first half of her book, such unfortunate infants were often considered a subset of a larger category of gestational anomalies: infants that did not resemble their fathers. Such a categorization, with its implicit relegation of the mother to a passive role in the procreative process, placed the responsibility for any deviation from the paternal norm firmly with her. That is, it assumed that, unless she had somehow interfered, everything would have turned out as desired. But theories that allotted the female parent greater legitimate participation in the shaping of normal offspring also tended to blame her for any glitches. (Scientific consensus around the modern notion of the roughly equal contribution of both parents did not emerge until the nineteenth century.) Thus Huet persuasively argues that anti-feminism, the result of masculine uneasiness about the inevitable female mediation between fathers and their children, was from the beginning a prominent element of scientific and lay discussions of monstrosities.

From almost any theoretical perspective, the female imagination seemed particularly problematic. If women were considered passive, and thus easily impressionable, their uncontrollable imagination might be a channel through which unwelcome external influence might help to form or malform a developing infant. Thus, in the Renaissance, birthmarks were often ascribed to the expectant mother's fascination with an object of the same shape; women extremely vulnerable to such stimulation might bear infants whose deformed bodies had been entirely shaped in this way. For example, according to Ambroise Paré, a woman who had conceived while clasping a live frog in her hand (apparently a fever remedy) gave birth to a frog-faced infant. More metaphorically, monstrous births were often interpreted either as evidence for or punishment of maternal transgression. The connection between monstrosi-

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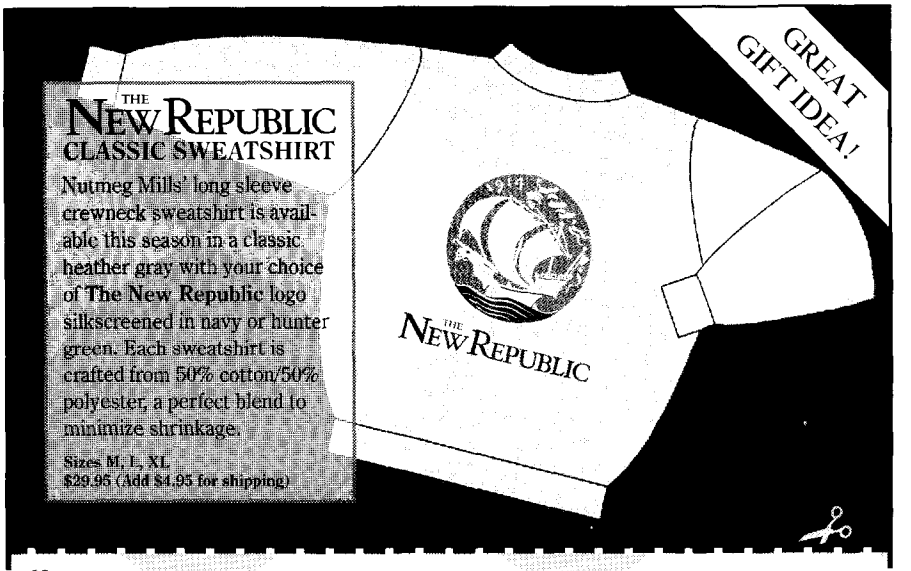
ties, bastards and the undermining of proper patriarchal influence is easy to see here. Indeed, in 1619 a trial in France examined whether a seriously deformed child was legitimate—that is, whether it could inherit its father's estate.

If the passivity of women—that is, their inability to discipline their imaginations—could thus deprive men of their due influence (or, indeed, of any influence at all) in the shaping of their offspring, the absence of such passivity led to problems at least equally troublesome. The woman whose child's body willy-nilly testified to her obsession or her sin was at least guileless. Weak or guilty though she might have been, she was unable to efface the evidence of her lapses. By the eighteenth century, however, many scientists believed that at least some women might be able to control their imaginations much more effectively than this earlier paradigm suggested. (Huet draws most of her examples from France, but strongly suggests that French concerns were widely shared.) In such cases, a child that resembled its father and bore no blemish or monstrosity might be a sign that the processes of conception and gestation had proceeded by the rules, with no unseemly maternal interference. Yet it might also signal the reverse: if the female imagination was not merely a conduit for external influence, but an active force over which women could exercise control, expectant mothers could intentionally alter the shape of their infants, blocking any embarrassing revelations. In this case a perfect baby might well be the result not of docile maternal compliance, but of accomplished maternal duplicity.

Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, the unmediated action of nature could be seen as the producer of dissemblances rather than resemblances, and resemblance could be seen as the product of art or imagination, rather than of nature. Huet connects this shift or complication in the scientific discussion of birth anomalies with a much broader contemporary cultural movement—the increasing celebration of the power of the human imagination, of which the best known expression is Romantic literature. Thus, she claims that apparently unrelated aesthetic and scientific discourses—discourses that often have been perceived as antagonistic—shared important formative influences, and maintained some continuous connection, at least on the level of metaphor and zeitgeist. She further suggests that the gender rivalries expressed in the discussion of monstrosities were replicated in this larger discourse. The newly appreciated imaginative power was generally conceived as masculine. Its potential enhancement of the feminine role in gestation was an unanticipated and disturbing side effect. In Huet's view, the primary consequence of the growing appreciation of imaginative power was to tip the reproductive scales in the male direction. Intellectual and artistic creativity were celebrated not only as superior to their merely biological analogue, but, in a fit of doomed metaphoric hubris, as a replacement for it.

Beneath the learned and unlearned opinions that Huet discusses there lurked the male resentment of the unique female ability to bear children. In the second half of her book, which focuses on the period since 1800, she explores a series of masculine attempts, fueled by intellectual or imaginative power alone, to appropriate this maternal prerogative. Since nineteenth-century biology offered no physical means of supplanting the female parent, the shift from analysis or speculation to experiment also involves a shift in Huet's focus, away from the arena of science. Almost all of the would-be creators she discusses are drawn from the realm of the arts, especially literature. (The exception is a chapter about Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, which, although full of fascinating material, seems out of place.) She interprets the works of fiction in which these overreachers appear as continuations of the scientific debate of earlier periods. Indeed, she makes this claim in the strongest possible way. That is, not only does she present a theme that has often been considered to be quintessentially aesthetic as rooted in science of the most concrete and pragmatic kind, but she suggests that after the eighteenth century, the most serious consideration of this theme was in a literary rather than a scientific arena.

Perhaps inevitably, she begins her literary survey with *Frankenstein*, a novel by a female author about the catastrophic attempt of a male scientist to create life single-handedly. Frankenstein's doomed quest fits easily within the framework of imaginationism and anti-feminism that Huet has established with respect to the scientific discussion of monstrosities. In the best chapter in the book, Huet considers a more metaphorical attempt by male artists to usurp female procreativity. She juxtaposes fictions by Hawthorne, Poe and Balzac, all of which treat portraiture as a rival mode of generation. In them, the female once more is relegated to a passive role, that of the model whose image is "re-created" by the painter. The keenness of this rivalry can be measured by the deadliness of its consequences: once (or perhaps because) her image is captured on canvas, the original can be left to die. Huet returns to literal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attempts to create life with *L'Ève Future* by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, with Thomas Alva Edison in the Frankenstein role. He attempts to console a gentleman of refined sensibility for the fact that the flesh and blood beauty who has captivated him is vulgar and stupid by creating a mechanical woman of equal beauty and superior wit. Finally, Huet discusses Gustav Meyrick's *Der Golem*, which is based on a Jewish folk tradition about clay automatons who can be brought to life by the proper combination of Hebrew letters. It is told from the perspective of the unfortunate automaton, rather than from that of the aspiring creator, and its unfolding demonstrates the ultimate monstrosity of such motherless creations.

Indeed, Huet concludes that this is the message of all the works she discusses in the second half of *Monstrous Imagination*, although the monstrosity in question here may be of a rather rarefied, metaphorical kind. Frankenstein's creation is visibly grotesque, like the misshapen infants that had occupied the attention of scientists, and the horror of Edison's creation is veiled by stunning looks and irresistible charm; but the moral is the same in both cases. Attempts to escape the restraints of the masculine condition by substituting literary contrivance, or even inspiration, for biological gestation are doomed, at best, to failure. Even in the realm of fantasy, male imagination could not convincingly replicate the works of women, any more than male science could explain away the dominant female role in childbirth.

Monstrous Imagination is a fascinating book that belongs to an emerging genre of literary studies, often roughly grouped under the rubric of "literature and science." But it is bolder in conception and more imaginative in method than many similar works, which simply trace the literary treatment of scientific themes or analyze works of science from a rhetorical perspective. Such approaches reinforce the traditional discontinuities between these two intellectual modes, making the "and" in "literature and science" a divider rather than a bridge. Indeed, the dead metaphor of separation that produces the perceived need for a "bridge" is itself the result of the conventional understanding that these spheres are irreconcilably distinct. The most exciting aspect of Huet's treatment of monstrosities is her suggestion that no bridge is needed, that establishment science and literature belong to a single cultural continuum, one that also includes a variety of popular treatments of similar themes. (Huet begins with mythological monsters and ends with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, a cinematic recasting of traditional fears about legitimate parentage.)

This suggestion could have been pursued more vigorously than it is in *Monstrous Imagination*. The structure of the book suggests that monstrosities were the concern of science or natural philosophy approximately through the period of the Enlightenment, after which, with the exception of a few atavistic survivals like the teratologists, scientists abandoned this topic, leaving it to creative spirits unburdened by the demands of evidence and logic. This chronological division further suggests that, perhaps because their assumptions about the genesis of monstrosity were ultimately superseded by quite different theories based in the distinctively modern subdisciplines of embryology and ultimately genetics, the scientific discussions of the eighteenth century and earlier can be most fruitfully read as a background or context for subsequent literary treatments. But teratologists were not universally scorned by their scientific colleagues, and, especially if science is understood to include a range of relatively pragmatic inquiries into the operations of the natural world, scientific interest in monstrosities flourished alongside the fantasizing of nineteenth-century fiction writers.

Thus Charles Lyell, Darwin's geological mentor, suggested a taxonomical explanation for monstrous births, grouping them with hybrids (a common juxtaposition). There were repeated attempts to systematize the "major terata," both by physicians and surgeons interested in treatment and prevention and by anthropologists interested in the limits of human variability. Monstrosities were a constant preoccupation of stockbreeders and pet fanciers, among whose inbred charges they seemed to occur with special frequency; they were the stock-in-trade of horticulturists, whose clients demanded new varieties of popular flowers each year. And fascinated members of the general public continued to pay to view human anomalies—dwarfs and giants, Siamese twins and bearded ladies, microcephalic children and armless adults—in sideshows. They were joined at these viewings by scientists similarly eager to explore the boundaries of natural possibility—scientists who also read *Frankenstein* or (later) saw *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Thus it is possible to imagine an interpretation of monstrosities even more expansive than the one that Huet so compellingly presents, one that would explore the cultural web in which science and non-science, art and non-art, popular and non-popular are inextricably commingled.

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TRB *continued from page 6*

Under the Guaranteed Student Loan program, banks loan money to students; the government guarantees the loans and pays the interest while the students are in school. It's a great deal for the banks, and for the Student Loan Marketing Association (Sallie Mae), which buys these government-guaranteed loans from banks and remarkets them. It's a lousy deal for the government, which pays the banks an interest rate three points higher than its own direct borrowing costs.

In its original budget, the Clinton administration proposed eliminating the middleman, loaning the money directly and saving about $1 billion a year. But opponents—with high-powered lobbying from the student loan industry—argued that this was "big government," and ultimately got the reform whittled down to a small pilot program.

It's true that putting all these loans on the books of the government rather than on the books of private banks would increase the putative size of the government in general and the national debt in particular. But obviously that's not a sensible basis for judging whether reforming the student loan program is a good idea. The "big government" obsession obscures more than it clarifies.

Although conservatives are big on labeling any government regulation they don't like as a covert "tax," they get highly indignant when, by a similar logic, tax loopholes for this or that purpose are labeled "spending." The tax code is full of them: $42 billion a year subsidizing housing through the home mortgage interest deduction; $10 billion for the exclusion of interest on life insurance savings; $57 billion for the exclusion of employer-paid health insurance; dozens of tiny but treasured breaks of a few hundred million dollars here and there for various industries.

The taxophobia that infects American public debate is almost clinical. How much time, energy and emotion were spent last summer debating Clinton's "middle-class tax increase"—which consisted of 4.3 cents per gallon on gasoline? Yet the gas tax came on October 1, and how many people even noticed it much? As it happens, gasoline is in the process of going down more than four cents a gallon, thanks to chaos in OPEC. Gas prices fluctuate more than four cents a gallon all the time, and little attention is paid. Americans don't seem to mind sending their money to the government treasury in Riyadh nearly as much as they mind sending it to the government treasury in Washington. That's nutty.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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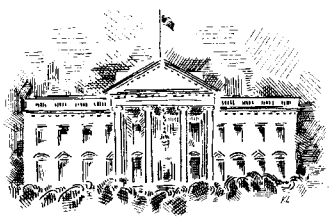
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Safe and sorry

HENRY FAIRLIE, WHO INVENTED and perfected the Diarist, was never at a loss for the kind of exploitable daily life the genre thrives on: he once devoted this space to ruminating on the exclamation "oops!" I've had that word very much in mind ever since I began moonlighting as a volunteer activist in my neighborhood. Still, there's a lot to be said for the travails of being a point of light. I'm not sorry to report that the experience is nothing like the glowing, gratifying gesture it's cracked up to be. Instead it promotes two greatly underrated ingredients of successful community life: lots of complaining and a good dose of pessimism. After several weekends of door-to-door canvassing on behalf of our cause, our cadre of do-gooders is eagerly swapping gripes and groans at every meeting, and in plenty of phone calls in-between. I've been kvetching more publicly as well, on the tried and true theory that virtue is never its own reward, and that inspiring civic guilt in others is a force for good. Around this office, the reaction to my grousing has been predictably cynical, but constructive: "At least you can get a Diarist out of it," I was reminded.

SO WHAT'S THE NOBLE CAUSE? Fixing up the run-down neighborhood playground, which is a safety hazard and an eyesore. Left to its own devices, the nearly bankrupt D.C. government might eventually do something—no doubt minimal (so far, the two broken slides have been blocked off with wooden boards, which are of course an enticement, not a deterrent, to kids). With prodding from us activists, the Department of Recreation has pledged to provide matching funds of up to $15,000: it's one of those exciting public-private partnerships, drawing on grass-roots volunteerism, that's touted as a cure for crumbling communities. Except that up close, you can't help being reminded of the limitations of the concept, even in a well-off enclave like mine. We pushy parents can draw up legal agreements, apply fund-raising experience, produce classy p.r. material, compile data on our high-powered computers. We have some hope of intimidating the District bureaucrats, who every so often hint that this mission of ours isn't a top priority of theirs (as well it shouldn't be, I start thinking traitorously as our meetings drag on: surely they have better things to do with their time). Not least, we have spouses at home who will baby-sit when we disappear for our marathon evening meetings, without which such a project would not be a true "commitment." In short, it takes a pretty habilitated community to rehabilitate a community. Even so, I've had more than a few moments of feeling dubious about our prospects. We're not pioneers; a previous playground committee has already tried, and failed. I mistakenly called one of those veterans for help with our leafleting effort. All I got was a long sigh. But it served, unexpectedly, as inspiration. Compared with fatalism, pessimism has, or can have, pep: you come to count on that crucial quality, fire in the bellyaching.



PORING OVER CATALOGS OF SHINY new playground equipment was my idea of the fun part, the reward for communal toil. But it was a bit of a letdown: everything is so *safe*. Even before the apparatus in our park developed truly perilous cracks, holes and protrusions, it was in many ways a parent's or baby sitter's nightmare; that is, it was a kid's sadomasochistic dream, precisely the kind of fantasy we post-Bettelheim parents should be wary of inhibiting. The spaces between climbing platforms were just the right size for toddlers to fall through; they'd teeter provocatively at the edge, smiling serenely down on the agitated grown-ups below. The top of the curving slide had no real guardrail, which made pushing and shoving to go first a high-stakes sport, not just a dutiful ritual. The one-of-a-kind roller slide was famous for unpredictably pinching fingers and the backs of chubby thighs, and was therefore doubly exciting. And the huge metal rocking contraption at the far end of the playground was obviously capable of crushing frail bones, especially when the bigger kids got it going fast. As soon as the creaking and shrieking got wild enough in that corner, small victims would come running as fast as their breakable legs could carry them.

THE NEW PARAPHERNALIA, WHICH meets the most rigorous safety standards, is designed to curtail all Sadean excitement. Every open space on a climbing structure is carefully barricaded, no opening anywhere wide enough for a juvenile head to fit through. Slides are constructed so that there can be no jockeying at the top of the ladder; railings guide kids into single file, like cows lining up for milking. Glinting aluminum slides are out of style, even though they're fast (and get faster with use, buffed to a slippery sheen by rear after rear); they warm up in the sun, and children are now considered too delicate to take the heat. Looking for a landmark piece of equipment to replace our beloved flesh-pincher and limb-crusher, we thought early on we had found at least a stomach-churner: one of those merry-go-rounds that we remembered spinning on as kids until we were staggeringly dizzy. It still exists, under the new and promising name of "whirl." "With hydraulic brake," the catalog adds, as if advertising a desirable frill. It automatically kicks in just in time to kill that addictive centrifugal high.

WHILE CHILDREN'S PUBLIC TERrain is being redesigned so that adults can rest easy in it, grown-up spaces are facing a discomfiting renovation in their turn: kids will soon run freely in almost all of them, at least in New York City. Thanks to new rules handed down by the Commission on Human Rights, discrimination on the grounds of age is about to be prohibited in public places. The new dispensation nominally applies to the old as well as the young, but on closer inspection the benefits to both ends of the spectrum seem a little dubious to me. Seniors are much more likely to end up complaining than prospering; naturally they care less about storming noisy aerobics classes (a few of which exclude them) and more about strolling quietly through, say, the Frick Collection (which bars children under 10). And it's not at all clear that even kids truly stand to gain much—not even sweet revenge on their elders. Instead, this has the look of another plot by us selfish baby boomer parents to suit our own convenience while claiming concern for youthful independence. Drag the kids everywhere at any age, and in the name of enrichment you can be sure to enervate them. It was being *turned away* at the imposing door of the Frick with my mother that left the real mark on me as a child. It immediately became the most dangerous and desirable museum. And when she later sneaked me in at the age of 9 (with the connivance of the guard, I now suspect, though I didn't then), I walked through those rooms in a state of terrified (and mute) enthrallment.

ANN HULBERT

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